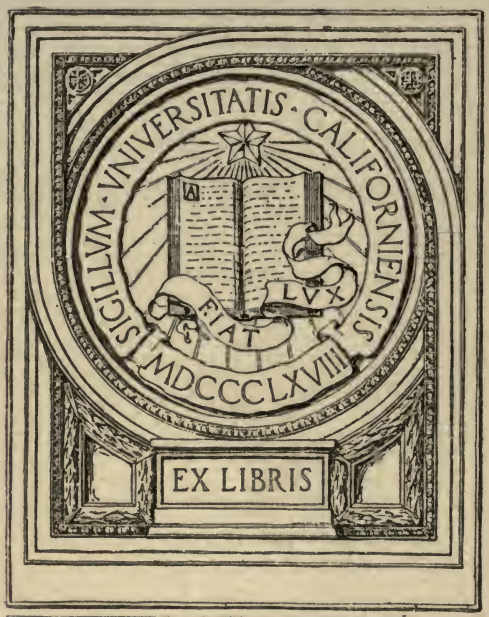
THREE · PLAYS

FRANCIS · A · MACNUTT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THREE PLAYS

BALBOA - XILONA

THE VICTORIOUS DUCHESS

THREE PLAYS

BALBOA XILONA
THE VICTORIOUS DUCHESS

By
FRANCIS A. MAC NUTT

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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I

BALBOA

A Drama of Darien

IN

Seven Scenes and a Prologue

Characters in the Prologue

Ferdinand, *King of Aragon.*
Johanna the Mad, *Queen of Castile, his daughter.*
Las Casas, *a Dominican Friar.*
Fonseca, *Bishop of Burgos.*
Conchillos, *Private Secretary to the King.*
Zamudio, *Messenger from Balboa.*
Don Pedrarias d'Avila, *Governor of Darien.*
Doña Isabel, *His wife.*
Enciso, *an explorer.*
Quevedo, *Bishop of Darien.*

Four ladies in attendance on the Queen: a dwarf, court jester to the late King Philip the Fair; some courtiers, Dominican friars, etc.; a cardinal, clergy of the royal chapel, men at arms on duty at the Court.

THE PROLOGUE

In the upper room of a monastery in Valladolid: gothic arches opening across the back upon a cloister, through which a view of roofs and towers and the reddening sunset sky. Double doorway to the right approached by several steps leads into a chapel: opposite is a similar doorway, but without steps. Furniture consists of two gothic throne-like chairs, standing together, left, facing stage; before them stands a massive table strewn with maps, parchments, etc., on which stand important candlesticks bearing lighted candles, and a globe. At the extreme back, right, between the chapel door and the arches leading into the open cloister, stands a bier covered with a black velvet pall: two lighted torches of yellow wax burn in portable bearers of silver or iron. Around the bier stand several Dominican friars reciting prayers, sotto voce, and four bearers in royal liveries.

Upon the two thrones are seated KING FERDINAND *and* JOHANNA THE MAD *of Castile: behind, and to one side of the Queen, stand four ladies, two of whom are old, wrinkled, stout or otherwise devoid of good looks, while the two others are young and*

good looking enough. Near the King at the end of the table are grouped the Bishop of Burgos, the Bishop of Darien, LAS CASAS, CONCHILLOS *and several courtiers. Upon the table stand two bowls, one containing specimens of gold nuggets and the other of pearls, sent by Balboa, as evidence of the wealth of Darien and Panama.*

KING

What more does the fellow write?

CONCHILLOS

[*Reading from Balboa's letter.*]

That southern ocean is navigable for ships, and the Indians tell me that it is always calm and serene, never tempestuous like our Atlantic. The rivers flowing into it, carry down golden nuggets as large as oranges, and everywhere along the shores and islands large and fair pearls are found in such quantities that all the women wear ropes of them, and the chiefs possess basketsful. Along the coast of the mysterious ocean there lies a vast and rich country unvisited by white men, where emeralds are mined and gold is so common that the inhabitants use it for their household utensils, just like iron with us.

KING

This sounds like what Marco Polo wrote of Cathay and the wealth of the Grand Khan.

CONCHILLOS

Or the accounts of the kingdom of Prester John.

BURGOS

It is a tale of Ophir.

KING

Hum, the fellow writes with a ready pen, but is he to be trusted?

BURGOS

All these adventurers write alike when it is a question of obtaining Your Grace's commission and a grant of money. We must verify.

KING

What does the fellow want?

CONCHILLOS

He wants a thousand well-armed men, some culverins and arquebuses, with a supply of ammunition and well-provisioned ships.

KING

He wants much. What did you say was his name?

CONCHILLOS

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.

BURGOS

An hidalgo of gentle birth from an impoverished family in Xeres de los Caballeros.

KING

Does anybody know him?

LAS CASAS

And it please Your Grace, I know him.

KING

[*Quizzically.*]

I'll be bound thou dost, friar. Dost know any good of him?

LAS CASAS

I know not more evil than of his fellow bandits who murder and rob in Your Grace's name in the Indies; he is brave and he is daring.

KING

When went he first thither?

BURGOS

He first shipped twelve years ago with one Labastides and never returned to Spain. The bearer of this letter, Sire, a colonist of Darien named Zamudio, awaits Your Grace's pleasure.

KING

Let Zamudio be summoned.

[*Exit a courtier.*]

Where are the specimens of gold?

[*Nuggets in a silver dish are put before the King, who examines them.*]

Has the metal been tested?

BURGOS

The assayers report indifferently.

KING

[*Mumbling.*]

Poor stuff, poor stuff! And where are the pearls?

[*Pearls in a silver bowl are shown him.*]

KING

[*Examining.*]

Small, no weight, bad shape, no orient. Poor stuff, poor stuff. 'Tis now twenty odd years since the Genoese, Columbus, discovered these lands, and thus far we have had nothing from them save expense and trouble.

BURGOS

These specimens, Sire, are from the interior. Balboa reports that better will be found on the sea coast.

KING

How does he know that when he has never been there? A plague upon these lying navigators.

CONCHILLOS

[*Showing a large pearl.*]

This stone, Your Grace, is not unworthy of your acceptance.

KING

[*Looking at pearl.*]

'Tis not so bad. Indeed it is the best we have seen, but 'tis only one.

[*Enter courtier with* ZAMUDIO.]

COURTIER

Senor Zamudio, the messenger.

QUEEN

[*Starting up.*]

From Flanders?

KING

[*Soothingly.*]

No, my child, not from Flanders, from Darien.

QUEEN

Where is Darien?

KING

[*Pointing on map.*]

Darien is in the Indies: here it is marked on this chart.

QUEEN

[*Heedlessly.*]

No messenger comes from Flanders. My husband bides long away. Once he sent messengers to announce his coming. Now he sends none.

KING

One will come anon. Give attention now to this business which has to do with the extension of your sovereignty in this new world.

[*To* ZAMUDIO.]

Speak and disclose the project of . . . what's his name?

CONCHILLOS

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, Sire.

KING

Just so, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.

[*Queen relapses into her lethargy.*]

ZAMUDIO

While exploring the new countries recently pacified and brought under Your Grace's royal sceptre, Balboa learned from a chieftain called Comogre, that beyond the mountain frontiers of that province, there was a vast ocean never seen by white men. It stretches infinitely to the south and west.

KING

How far distant from Darien?

ZAMUDIO

No great distance, Sire, as a bird flies, but difficult to approach for want of roads. The track leads through treacherous swamps infested with poisonous

reptiles, and over rugged mountains where ferocious beasts of prey have their lairs. Cannibal tribes, fiercer than the lions and tigers, dwell there. Along the coast of that mighty ocean stretches a land rich in emeralds, pearls and gold.

KING

What proof has Balboa that this chieftain's tale is true?

ZAMUDIO

The chief has become a Christian; he is baptised Carlos.

KING

Um . . . he may still be a liar for all that.

ZAMUDIO

He is our friend and does not lie. All his treasures come from that ocean.

KING

Why does he reveal this secret to strangers? Why does he not keep the knowledge of such treasure to himself?

LAS CASAS

Because, Your Grace, those children of nature in the new world prize not wealth. The lust for gold is a curse they have escaped, and they know no difference between *mine* and *thine.*

KING

[*Slyly.*]
Some Christians who do know it seem to forget it.

LAS CASAS

The Indians hold all things in common and share alike the products of beneficent Nature. They even esteem it better to give than to receive.

KING

This apostolic disposition should be encouraged.

QUEVEDO

I doubt not that our Spaniards attend to that.

LAS CASAS

They would do better to imitate it.

ZAMUDIO

Balboa beseeches Your Grace to give him authority to discover and take possession of this unknown ocean for Spain. He needs a thousand men well armed and equipped.

KING

He is modest.

BURGOS

It should not be forgotten, Sire, that Nicuesa, to whom Your Grace gave jurisdiction over those countries, was expelled from Darien, sent to sea in an

open boat and has never since been seen: his partner, Enciso, has lodged a complaint against this same Balboa and is now at court to plead his cause. (*He signs to courtier to call Enciso.*)

[*Exit courtier.*]

KING

I do remember. We will hear Enciso. Has he come?

QUEEN

[*Starting.*]

Has he come . . . from Flanders?

KING

[*Soothingly.*]

Not yet, my daughter. We discuss affairs of State. (*The Queen relapses into her lethargy.*)

ZAMUDIO

Nicuesa's jurisdiction never extended to Darien. His boundaries are clearly marked upon the chart. (*They examine a map.*)

[*Enter* Enciso.]

CONCHILLOS

Your Grace, Enciso is here.

KING

[*To* Enciso.]

Approach. You have lodged complaint against Vasco Nuñez de Balboa. What is your accusation?

ENCISO

Murder, usurpation and treason, Your Grace.

KING

These are big words.

ENCISO

Balboa put Nicuesa in an unseaworthy boat and turned him adrift: he has seized the power he unlawfully exercises. He is a tyrant who acts without warrant, as though he held Your Grace's commission. He robbed me, Your Grace's representative, of my property, and after casting me into prison, he drove me from the colony and sent me back to Spain.

ZAMUDIO

Nicuesa was repulsed from Darien by all the colonists, for he had no right there. I submit, Your Grace, that were Balboa guilty of this act or of treasonable designs, he would not release Enciso and send him hither to act as his accuser.

QUEVEDO

Not unless he be a fool.

LAS CASAS

He may be anything you like, but not that.

KING

[*Musingly.*]

There is somewhat in your argument.

ZAMUDIO

Had Balboa aught to fear, he might have held Enciso prisoner — or even killed him.

LAS CASAS

Killing is common enough in those parts.

KING

[*To* Enciso.]

What do you answer?

ENCISO

He dared do neither because of the sentiment in the colony. The people are weary of his tyranny and only await Your Grace's warrants to arrest him and bring him to trial. Here are my charges drawn up in due order (*showing paper*), of which I beg Your Grace to cause a hearing to be had before impartial judges. The list of Balboa's misdeeds and crimes is lengthy. (Conchillos *takes the paper.*)

KING

[*To* Burgos.]

Refer these charges to Our India Council and report their decision to me. This matter must be sifted. I know not whom to believe.

BURGOS

By Your Grace's orders, a new governor, Pedrarias d'Avila, has been appointed for Darien, with full

powers to investigate all charges against Balboa and to execute justice. His commission awaits the Queen's signature and that of Your Grace. (CONCHILLOS *lays the commission on the table.*)

KING

Pedrarias is a gallant soldier. He tilts a doughty lance.

BURGOS

[*To courtier.*]
Admit the governor of Darien.
[*Exit courtier.*]

KING

Aye, aye, Pedrarias dances an uncommon graceful step; though he has left his youth behind him, he is still called the " gallant " Pedrarias.

LAS CASAS

[*Sarcastically.*]
Just the man to govern a colony in the new world and to convert the Indians.

BURGOS

He has enrolled a company of fifteen hundred men, amongst whom are many gentlemen eager to serve Your Grace in the Indies.

LAS CASAS

Serve the devil and their own pockets.

KING

[*Reading.*]

Fifteen hundred men? This expedition is costing our treasury a pretty outlay.

BURGOS

Think of the profits, Sire.

KING

I do think of them, but unfortunately the profits are problematical, while the outlay is certain.

[*Enter* PEDRARIAS *leading* DOÑA ISABEL; *and courtier.*]

COURTIER

Don Pedrarias d'Avila.

BURGOS

Your Grace's newly appointed governor of Darien.

PEDRARIAS

[*Making obeisance.*]

I kiss your hand, Sire, and render thanks for the high favour Your Grace has shown me. (DOÑA ISABEL *curtseys profoundly.*)

KING

We have set you no easy task but we know your loyalty and count upon it. Doña Isabel, do you accompany Don Pedrarias?

ISABEL

With Your Grace's leave.

KING

The journey is long.

ISABEL

Waiting for him to return would be longer.

KING

There are dangers and privations.

ISABEL

I would suffer them all a thousand fold rather than eat my heart out in Spain. My place is with my husband.

KING

May God keep you both and give you a prosperous voyage. (*Both bow low.*) You will administer justice in the colony and bring the strife and contention between these petitioners to an end.

CONCHILLOS

Don Pedrarias' commission awaits the royal signature. Likewise the new edicts for the government of the colony and the Indians are ready.

LAS CASAS

I beseech Your Grace send not fifteen hundred more assassins to murder your Indian subjects.

BURGOS

Insolent friar! Do you thus designate the chivalry of Spain?

LAS CASAS

I am an eye witness of the deeds of Spanish chivalry among those defenceless people.

KING

We labour first of all for the conversion of the Indians to our holy faith. The Pope has so commanded us.

LAS CASAS

Then in God's name, Sire, send not these rapacious fortune-seekers who torture, burn and hang innocent natives to obtain their gold. What sane Indian will be won by such methods to embrace a religion its preachers do not practise?

KING

This is strong speech, friar.

LAS CASAS

Nay, Your Grace, 'tis weak and feeble enough, nor can human tongue describe the horrors our people work in those lands Almighty God created an earthly paradise.

BURGOS

Wild exaggerations that defame our nation.

LAS CASAS

Then it is strange no man stands forth to disprove my charges. If Your Grace will govern well, send to the Indies frugal, industrious emigrants who will till the soil and labour with their hands to develop the country, rather than frivolous courtiers who go only to exploit it to their own profit. If you would convert the Indians, send them zealous friars of apostolic life who will preach the faith, not dissolute soldiers who debauch and murder them.

BURGOS

Cease this insolent ranting in Their Graces' presence.

LAS CASAS

For full five years I have proclaimed these truths throughout Spain and I shall continue till justice be done the Indians.

KING

Will nothing silence thy tongue?

LAS CASAS

Unless you take my head . . . there is no other way.

KING

Thou settest so little store upon it, I suspect it is of small value. Don Pedrarias, you will have Our Council's instructions. Now also I charge you to

report truthfully upon the conditions in the colony and upon the progress made in converting the Indians to the Catholic faith. His Holiness has designated this bishop for Darien. (*Indicates* QUEVEDO.)

PEDRARIAS

Your Grace may rely upon me. (*He and* QUEVEDO *speak together aside.*)

LAS CASAS

'Twere better never an Indian were converted and never a rood added to the Spanish realm than that these things be done by such means as are now employed.

BURGOS

[*To the Queen.*]

Your Grace's signature to the Governor's commission and to the edict is required. (*The Queen absently takes the papers.*) Sign here, Madam.

LAS CASAS

[*Kneeling before the Queen.*]

I do beseech Your Grace, who is Queen of Castile, to protect these your Indian subjects.

QUEEN

[*Interested.*]

For that am I queen — to protect my subjects. Who harms them?

LAS CASAS

Our Spaniards who are sent thither to make them Christians and loyal subjects, torment and destroy them. They tear children from their parents and wives from their husbands, to make slaves of them.

QUEEN

Wives separated from their husbands! This must not be. It is my will that these Indians whom God has given into my keeping shall be free. Let none molest them; let none dare to enslave them. Wives and husbands shall dwell together in peace and unity under the protection of my crown . . . together.

BURGOS

Your Grace. . . .

QUEEN

Who are you?

KING

Our most wise and trusted president of the India Council, the bishop of Burgos.

QUEEN

Then let him betake himself to his diocese where a bishop belongs. Let us now despatch this governor — as well him as another — but the drawing of the new laws may wait yet awhile. (*She signs the commission. To* PEDRARIAS.) Sir, you have heard my

will, and forget not that I am Queen of Castile. (*To* Las Casas, *handing him the unsigned edict.*) Friar, I like thy speech. Take this and come with me. We will draw the new laws as thou wouldst have them. There must be no tears shed by my Indian subjects. Now I go to Tordesillas. (*She rises.*)

KING

[*Protestingly.*]
It is already night. Be advised, my daughter.

QUEEN

It is always night and therefore do I now go. Since the sun has gone out forever and I am a widow, there is no more day for me. . . .

BURGOS

If Your Grace will have patience, there is still business to be despatched.

QUEEN

This is no time for business. (*She rises and leaves her seat followed anxiously by her ladies.*) Now is my marriage day at hand and Philip is come from Flanders. (*She goes to the bier, stares and then sobs.*) . . . His bier is my marriage bed. Life divided, but death unites us. (*To the attendants.*) Uncover the King's face. (*They lift back the pall: the Queen turns and scans the faces of her ladies.*) Art thou fair? Then stand aside for he must not

look on thee. (*She signs the two younger ones aside and permits the old women to advance with her.*) Now let us get hence from this place. We go to Tordesillas. Where is the fool? (*A court-fool, dwarf, in cap and bells, approaches her and cuts a caper.*) He always liked to have thee near, for thou hast a merry wit. Philip loved to laugh. (*She laughs.*) No, no! Get out of my sight. This is no place for fools and laughter. We go upon an eternal pilgrimage hand in hand with death. Cover the King's face and let a dirge be sung. (*They cover the bier; the De Profundis is begun by the choristers; the bearers lift the bier and go slowly after the choristers, followed by the Queen, her ladies and the fool.*)

[*Exeunt.*]

KING

[*Thoughtfully.*]

Was ever monarch so put to it as I?

BURGOS

This business then is settled. (*Gives* PEDRARIAS *his commission.*) Much is staked on this venture, from which great profits are promised.

LAS CASAS

Thus are kings deluded by knaves, and the traffic in human souls goes on.

KING

[*To* LAS CASAS.]

Friar, thou hadst best follow the Queen.

CONCHILLOS

You have worked mischief enough by your meddling.

BURGOS

Aye, both you and the fool, follow the Queen — likewise bereft of her reason.

LAS CASAS

She must indeed seem so to you since she loves justice and despises money, but be mindful, my lord bishop, that the wisdom of the world is foolishness before God. (*To the* KING.) With Your Grace's leave I go. I call upon the hierarchy of heaven and all the inhabitants of this earth to witness what I have spoken. If Your Majesty abandons those countries to the tyranny of such Spaniards as have until now gone thither, God's curse will fall upon Spain. (*To* BURGOS.) The Queen's folly leads to heaven, your wisdom takes you to hell. I follow the Queen.

[*Exit* LAS CASAS.]

BURGOS

This meddlesome monk is a very pest. (*To* PEDRARIAS.) You understand this man Balboa must be silenced. If there is anything in his report we'll do our own discovering without him.

KING

[*Chuckling.*]

I think the friar had thee on the hip, my lord of Burgos.

[*The angelus rings; all rise and cross themselves. The organ is heard in the church, the doors of which open: simultaneously the door on opposite side of the stage opens and a cardinal in cappa magna, preceded by a cross-bearer and followed by several ecclesiastics and his train-bearer, enters. He raises his biretta and bows to the King, who salutes and joins him, both ascending the church steps together followed by all the others. A priest vested in a golden cope and accompanied by two acolytes carrying lighted candles receives them at the door and all enter the church, while the choir inside sings: Ecce Sacerdos magnus.*]

CURTAIN

BALBOA

Characters in the Play

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.
Pedrarias d'Avila, *Governor of Darien.*
Francisco Pizarro
Arbolancho
Garabito
Botello
Argüello
} *Comrades of Balboa.*
Comogre, *an Indian Chief.*
Quevedo, *Bishop of Darien.*
Fulvia, *an Indian girl.*
Careta, *her brother.*
Doña Isabel, *Wife of Pedrarias.*
Tubunama, *an Indian seer.*
Ayora, *Captain of the guard.*
Valderrabaño, *a Notary.*
Executioner.

Soldiers, sailors and men under Balboa; Spanish followers of Pedrarias, Indians, negroes, Dominican friars and brothers of the Misericordia Fraternity.

BALBOA

SCENE I

At Santa Maria Darien

Interior of BALBOA'S *house. A large, lofty room built of logs, thatched roof showing beams; sparsely and rudely furnished save for two armchairs of Spanish leather with brass nails. Weapons on the walls, a holy picture before which burns a lamp. Through an open door and window at the back is seen a view of tropical landscape in bright sunshine.* FULVIA *cradles her baby in a hamac, crooning a plaintive, melancholy song. She is a beautiful young girl, dressed in soft, diaphanous stuffs, arms, legs and breast partially exposed; her hair is elaborately dressed with flowers and jewels and she wears several strings of pearls, bracelets, anklets, etc., and holds a fan of gorgeous feathers.*

FULVIA

[*Singing.*]

Rico lana, beri lubel,
Ferni rizé, copa timaré,
Tuhé, Tabé, Tuhé.

Tantomanel, olivero cori solare
Tuhé, Tabé Tuhé.

BALBOA

Are there no Indian songs but sad ones, Fulvia?

FULVIA

This song is not sad. Very good song.

BALBOA

It sounds melancholy.

FULVIA

I sing to baby. I tell him he is a Spanish baby.

BALBOA

[*Teasing.*]
Oh, he is an Indian baby.

FULVIA

No, him Spanish baby and one day, bimeby, will be a great man like his father.

BALBOA

Let's look at him. He is an Indian baby.

FULVIA

Him Spaniard. See his sunshine hair, just like father's.

BALBOA

If he is Spanish, then he will some day go to Spain, far, far across the great waters — a long, long journey. And what wilt thou do then?

FULVIA

[*Doubtfully.*]

Perhaps I go too. Yes, by then I learn to be Spanish lady, and I go too. Tell me, Vasco, what must I do to be Spanish lady?

VASCO

Thou hadst best remain what thou art — the prettiest, the most fascinating little baggage that ever bewitched a Christian Spaniard's senses.

FULVIA

Yes, here in Darien — but to be a Spanish lady, so thou wouldst love me in Spain. (*A distant cannon shot is heard.*)

BALBOA

[*Starting up.*]

A ship! She was sighted early this morning in the offing. (*He goes to the door to look out.*)

[*Enter* GARABITO.]

GARABITO

Don Vasco, a ship is casting anchor. She has signalled.

BALBOA

I heard her gun. Is she from Spain?

GARABITO

Directly from Santo Domingo.

BALBOA

But originally from Spain, no doubt. If she but brings the letters from Zamudio; they are overdue. This life of idleness palls, and during long, empty weeks I dream of fresh conquests. Everything is ready for my expedition to the South Sea, only the King's commission is lacking. (*He puts on his sword and hat.*) Follow me, Garabito; I must know what news yon vessel brings.

[*Exit* BALBOA.]

GARABITO

I come.

[*Left alone with* FULVIA, GARABITO *eyes her meaningly, slowly approaching her.* FULVIA *resumes her song at the hamac. He suddenly tries to embrace her but she eludes him.*]

GARABITO

Don't be shy, you jade; we are alone.

FULVIA

[*Calmly.*]

I not shy. I hate you.

GARABITO

I taught you differently once, when you belonged to me.

FULVIA

I belong to Don Vasco . . . your master.

GARABITO

By lot you belonged to me. You were mine till he took you from me, curse him.

FULVIA

[*Mimicking.*]

Curse him, curse him. You no Spanish man; Spaniards do not lie. When Don Vasco here, then before his face you all smiles and bows: Don Vasco, my friend, my captain. Behind his back you say "curse him." You not even Indian man; you snake in the bush, alligator in the mud.

GARABITO

[*Catching her.*]

You taunt me, you hussy. I'll have you one way or another, by what means I can.

FULVIA

[*Struggling.*]

Let me go. I tell Vasco.

GARABITO

You tell Vasco and I'll kill you.

FULVIA

No, I tell Vasco and he kill you.

[*As they struggle enter* BALBOA.]

BALBOA

By the mass, what is this? You dare lay hands on her in my house.

[*He draws his sword.*]

GARABITO

She belongs to me, I had her first.

BALBOA

Well, I have her now. Draw, you bully of women, or I'll run you through where you stand. (*They cross swords.*)

[*Enter* PIZARRO.]

PIZARRO

Sacramento! Have Spaniards no other use for their swords, than to kill one another?

[*He rushes in with drawn sword and knocks up their blades.*]

Why, Vasco, what's this quarrel about?

BALBOA

[*To* GARABITO.]

Get hence and never show your face again at my threshold.

GARABITO

[*Recovering himself.*]

Nay, Don Vasco, you are too hot blooded; 'twas but a bit of play and I meant no harm.

BALBOA

I like not your play, nor does Fulvia.

GARABITO

The wench knows me.

BALBOA

Mind your tongue and be not so free with your "wench."

PIZARRO

Vasco, old friend, how often hast thou preached peace and good will amongst comrades, and here thou art at swords drawn with Garabito about an Indian girl.

BALBOA

Francisco, thou meanest well, but there is more behind than thou seest. Let him keep to his own women and leave my house to me.

GARABITO

Well, I bear no malice and am for peace, our friendship is of old date.

BALBOA

Friendship has its privileges and its obligations. I do not expect my friends to play the libertine in my household. There is an ugly name in Spain for such tricks. Fulvia, take away the boy. (*Exit* FULVIA *carrying the baby.*) No more of this for the pres-

ent. Francisco, I called you and Argüello to counsel. (*To* GARABITO.) Sir, I am now engaged with Señor Pizarro.

GARABITO

[*Sullenly.*]
As you will.
[*Exit* GARABITO.]

PIZARRO

Is it wise to make an enemy of Garabito?

BALBOA

Garabito is nobody's friend. If he will be my enemy, I cannot force his friendship.
[*Enter* ARGÜELLO.]

ARGÜELLO

[*Eagerly.*]
Well, Vasco, what news from Zamudio?

BALBOA

[*Gloomily.*]
This letter.

ARGÜELLO

And thy commission, has it come?

BALBOA

No. (GARABITO *appears stealthily listening at the window.*)

ARGÜELLO

Pest! And what's the matter now? What does Zamudio all these weary weeks at court?

BALBOA

When Zamudio reached Valladolid, he found himself already forestalled by Enciso who had prejudiced the Bishop of Burgos against me.

PIZARRO

But the King?

BALBOA

The King sees with the bishop's eyes and hears with the bishop's ears. Zamudio and Enciso confronted one another in the King's presence. It had all been prearranged by Burgos.

ARGÜELLO

But Zamudio took money — all our treasure to buy the bishop.

BALBOA

Well, it wasn't enough . . . or Enciso took more.

PIZARRO

The bishop comes high. Burgos doubtless collected from both.

BALBOA

And will serve neither.

ARGÜELLO

No commission for the expedition to the South Sea! *Cuerpo de Dios!*

PIZARRO

Neither men, nor ships, nor stores?

BALBOA

Nothing. I have got nothing from the King . . . neither commission, nor ships, nor arms, nor men; aye, less than nothing, for Zamudio has failed miserably and through the influence of the Bishop of Burgos a new governor is named for this colony who shortly sails with fifteen hundred men. I am to be tried.

PIZARRO

Per Dios! These stay-at-home busybodies make the King's service hard for us working men.

ARGÜELLO

This finishes me. All the treasure I sent to the King is swallowed up in the omnivorous maw of that insatiable bishop. I am a beggar by this.

BALBOA

My friends, we face a decisive moment. I take it you are not men to sit awaiting for this calamity to crush you. Hence have I summoned you, for no more am I. Since the King sends me no commission, I shall act without one. Success will justify our act,

while failure. . . . Well, failure will leave us no worse off than we are, nor shall I survive it.

PIZARRO

Name not the word.

ARGÜELLO

My last ducat is invested in this venture and if we fail, I am bankrupt.

PIZARRO

Thou hast seen bankruptcy before, Argüello.

ARGÜELLO

I was then younger with hope ahead. This is my last throw with fortune for I am old.

BALBOA

We shall not fail. Zamudio's report from Spain must rest with us; no suspicion that he has failed must get abroad. In this supreme moment we trust one another but none else. Several weeks must still elapse ere the new governor arrives: of them we must make good use.

PIZARRO

Whom does the King send us as governor?

BALBOA

Pedrarias d'Avila, and he brings his wife.

[*Exclamations of disgust.*]

ARGÜELLO

[*Reading* ZAMUDIO's *letter.*]

And fifteen hundred men, many of them gentlemen of the court.

PIZARRO

Gentlemen! forsooth, and what shall this colony do with gentlemen of the court?

ARGÜELLO

Work for them, feed them, give them the profit and take their kicks for thanks.

BALBOA

Experience inspires thy speech, Argüello. We have seen such things in Santo Domingo and Cuba. The governor will use us — our knowledge of this country and the language, our good relations with the Indians and our experience. He'll take the glory of the discovery for himself and sail away with his courtiers to Spain where they'll divide the treasure amongst them. *Per Dios!* I'll sweat and toil no longer in this pest-hole to profit a lot of mincing jack-a-napes.

PIZARRO

Nor I. 'Tis no pittance from their leavings will satisfy me; I am out for a fortune.

ARGÜELLO

Well, then, Vasco, what's in thy mind?

[BALBOA *goes to the door leading to the inner room and calls* FULVIA, *who appears.*]

BALBOA

[*To* FULVIA.]
Is the young chief, Comogre, still here?
[*She nods assent.*]

BALBOA

Call him quickly hither.
[*Exit* FULVIA.]
I pledge you both to secrecy. (*They clasp hands.*) We stand or we fall together, for what I plan is dubbed treason in Spain . . . unless it prove successful.

ARGÜELLO

Let us hear.

BALBOA

We must forestall the arrival of Pedrarias. With every able-bodied man the colony can muster, we'll start for the great South Sea of which Comogre has told me. I'll publish that my commission has come.

PIZARRO

But Comogre vows we need a thousand men and good arms and provisions.

ARGÜELLO

And we have them not.

BALBOA

Then we must go without them. Comogre will furnish us both warriors and porters to carry our baggage; he himself will be our guide. As for the provisions, we must live on the country.

PIZARRO

We have done it before.

[*Enter* COMOGRE.]

BALBOA

Draw near, Comogre, and tell us of the road to the great southern ocean.

COMOGRE

The road very hard, but Comogre will lead his friends by the easiest way.

PIZARRO

To the great South Sea?

COMOGRE

And to the islands of pearls and spices; and to the rich land beyond whence comes the gold the Christians love.

PIZARRO

I suffer from a malady of the eyes that only the sight of gold in large quantities can cure.

ARGÜELLO

My doctor recommends me to hang many strings

of large pearls around my neck against this rheum. (*He coughs.*)

COMOGRE

My people know not such ailments.

ARGÜELLO

The better for them. They are obstinate maladies.

BALBOA

How many men can we muster?

PIZARRO

Close on two hundred.

BALBOA

Arms enough?

PIZARRO

Pikes and swords in plenty; powder is scarce.

BALBOA

Never mind. We have our dogs. My brave Leoncino is worth a troop of musketeers. Comogre, we count on you for warriors and porters.

PIZARRO

And provisions . . . maize.

COMOGRE

All that my people possess belongs to our friends.

BALBOA

We start before dawn.

COMOGRE

I go prepare.

[*Exit* COMOGRE.]

ARGÜELLO

And I remain behind to face a greater danger than you . . . the arrival of Pedrarias.

BALBOA

We'll be back before them. We must meet him with the news of our great discovery.

ARGÜELLO

God grant it.

BALBOA

Be of good cheer, Argüello, for we shall not fail. We bear the cross of Christ and the image of His holy mother on our banner. We'll be the first Christians to gaze upon the great South Sea. That ocean shall be Spanish and pour the wealth of its watery depths and endless coasts into the treasure chest of Castile. For God, St. James and Spain! be our cry. We shall not fail!

[*Exeunt arm in arm.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A wild spot in a wood: tall fantastic crags rising amidst riotous tropical verdure. A steep slope rises across the background the rocky crest of which forms the skyline, the Pacific ocean lying beyond, invisible. Rough camping outfit, Indians busy with fire wood, a pot boiling over a fire. Spaniards reclining in extreme weariness and dejection, or occupied with the dogs. FULVIA, *carrying her baby, is seated with other Indian women to one side, where stands her mule.* COMOGRE *stands with* BALBOA, PIZARRO, ARBOLANCHO, GARABITO *and* BOTELLO; *it is evening and the gorge where the camp is lies in gloom, but beyond the skyline of the slope the sky is ablaze with a tropical sunset.*

COMOGRE

[*Pointing to the ridge.*]

From there, Captain, you will see the great waters.

GARABITO

From there, from there. . . . Always from somewhere else than where we are. I am sick of this aimless struggle through the jungle and so are the men.

BALBOA

[*Eagerly.*]
Far beyond?

COMOGRE

Not far beyond; just beneath the cliff lies the sea.

GARABITO

The same old yarn, the same old lies; it is never far, this accursed sea, but we never get there.

BALBOA

[*Enthusiastically.*]
I thought my forces spent and my legs unable to carry me another step, but this news is like wine in my veins . . . the wine of success that banishes weakness and revives strength. I'll not sleep till my eyes have looked upon the ocean; I must have fresh food for dreams to-night.

PIZARRO

Take heart, Garabito; we touch our goal.

GARABITO

I'll take heart when we touch our gold.

BALBOA

The gold will be ours in good time; for myself 'tis glory I seek; then will gold come to me.

PIZARRO

One more struggle and we shall be at the top: let us be off then.

BALBOA

Francisco, old friend, begrudge it me not, but I must look upon the great South Sea first . . . and alone. Stay thou here with the others. Comogre will lead me to the top and when I have looked my fill, thou shalt follow me.

PIZARRO

The right of the discovery is thine.

[COMOGRE *guides* BALBOA *up a rocky path and they disappear.*]

GARABITO

[*Sneeringly.*]

Generous — our captain, heh? We may toil and fight and starve in this wilderness where he has lost us, but when it comes to the great discovery we are not worthy to share it. "*Domine non sum dignus.*" (*He beats his breast.*)

PIZARRO

You are hard to please, Garabito.

ARBOLANCHO

But a moment since you were tired out and could go no farther. The cliff path is steep.

BOTELLO

Balboa is our leader and the discovery is by right his. Rest your bones and hold your tongue.

GARABITO

He'll be the same when we come to divide the treasure,— if there ever is any. You'll see how we shall fare.

PIZARRO

Your snarl is becoming chronic.

ARBOLANCHO

But not every barking cur bites. (*They move off.* GARABITO *approaches* FULVIA.)

GARABITO

Come with me.

FULVIA

No. I am to be Spanish lady and this *muchacho* is Vasco's son.

GARABITO

[*Sneeringly.*]

You little fool! You a Spanish lady; you are an Indian camp woman like the others; your brat is a bastard half-breed.

FULVIA

[*Serenely.*]

You think so? When I go with Don Vasco to Spain, then you will see.

GARABITO

Vasco will never take you to Spain, for he will never go himself. If ever we get back to Darien,

Vasco will go to prison; then you will belong to me again; better come now.

FULVIA

You think so. (*She begins to sing to the baby.*)

GARABITO

Drop the brat and listen to me.

[FULVIA *sings heedlessly.*]

GARABITO

[*Angrily.*]

I'll pay you out for this, you hussy. (*He moves away.*)

[COMOGRE *emerges on the crest of the ridge, followed by* BALBOA, *who staggers wearily; their figures sharply outlined on the fiery sky.*]

COMOGRE

Behold, captain, the great South Sea.

BALBOA

Thank God for this celestial vision. (*He falls on his knees with arms outstretched towards the ocean.*)

COMOGRE

Is it not as I told you? Comogre never lie.

BALBOA

The Southern Sea! the unknown ocean! Francisco! Comrades, come all and gladden your eyes

with the most wondrous sight ever yet shown to man.

[*The Spaniards start up the cliffs, pulling and pushing one another, uttering exclamations.* PIZARRO *is first to join* BALBOA.]

PIZARRO

Wonderful! Waters without end. Balboa! A vast uncharted sea that reaches away into the very sunset; no keel has ploughed its waters nor ground the sands of its virgin beaches. It shall be my glory to explore its splendours.

[*One by one the others arrive, all exclaiming and shouting. From the dense shrubbery near where* FULVIA *sits, her brother,* CARETA, *stealthily emerges; he is a young, lithe Indian, nearly naked, wearing an eagle's feather in his hair.*]

CARETA

[*Cautiously.*]
Fulvia.

FULVIA

[*Rising.*]
How come you here? Go 'way.

CARETA

I come to take you back, back to our people.

FULVIA

No.

CARETA

You stay here, then you die.

FULVIA

No, 'tis here I live.

CARETA

All great chiefs: Pacra, Poncha and many warriors are now ready and they will kill these foreign devils.

FULVIA

When?

CARETA

To-night. The sun now sets and, behold, it sets in blood, for before the moon lights this spot, every Christian shall die.

FULVIA

I am a Christian; I will not go back. Tell our people it is their blood the earth will drink. Bid them beware, for these Spaniards are as gods. For them the thunder speaks and the lightning strikes. How has it always been?

CARETA

It will not be so this time, for our people are ready and have arms. Rather than be slaves under these strangers, we will all die. Come.

FULVIA

No.

CARETA

You no longer love your brother?

FULVIA

I love my boy and his father Vasco.

CARETA

The curse of our gods will fall upon you, for you forget your people and turn against your blood: then you die.

[*He tries to seize her, but she eludes him. With a menacing gesture he disappears.* BALBOA *and the others clamber down, all in high spirits, laughing and embracing one another.*]

BALBOA

This news will ring through all the Spains. 'Tis a discovery rivalling those of Columbus and da Gama.

PIZARRO

He too was called Vasco. Thou art not named amiss, 'twould seem.

GARABITO

Well, I never heard that Columbus got much by his discoveries; he spent most of his time in the law courts or in gaol and he died a pauper.

BALBOA

Columbus was not a Spaniard. Whatever we ask, we'll get. Leave that to me.

GARABITO

[*Aside to one.*]

He may be trusted to ask enough for himself, our cheerful captain; but what shall we get?

PIZARRO

Now then, my men, to supper. How is it with the pot?

BOTELLO

For God's sake don't tell us what is in that stew! I am hungry and I want to eat.

ARBOLANCHO

I had a three days' appetite before we saw the great ocean, now a very famine is crying within me. (*They go to the cooking-pot; rations are served out amidst talking and laughter.* FULVIA *approaches* BALBOA.)

FULVIA

[*Stealthily.*]

Vasco.

BALBOA

Well, little one.

FULVIA

There is danger.

BALBOA

From what? Hast thou seen a serpent or heard a panther's cry?

FULVIA

Nay, but this place is now all around full of Indians. The great chiefs Pacra and Poncha with many, many warriors gather near to kill you this night while you sleep.

BALBOA

Who told you this?

FULVIA

My brother Careta.

BALBOA

When? Where?

FULVIA

Now, here.

BALBOA

Where is he?

FULVIA

Gone. Careta, him love me and come to take me to safe place because our people come this night to kill all Christians. Many, many — like leaves of the forest, and you so few.

BALBOA

And you did not go to your people?

FULVIA

No. You are my people now. This Chachito my

son; him Spanish baby and mother now Spanish lady, so she stay with him and Vasco. (*He embraces her.*)

BALBOA

You are made of the right stuff, Fulvia. Now we must make ready for our unexpected visitors. (*He calls* PIZARRO.) Well, Francisco, what sayest thou of this day's work? Sawst thou ever a fairer sea?

PIZARRO

Ah, 'twas a wondrous, stirring vision.

BALBOA

And I have stirring news . . . news to make us stir.

PIZARRO

What news is that, Vasco?

BALBOA

The Indians are upon us.

PIZARRO

Sacramento! Sayest thou then so?

BALBOA

Hush! Shall we tell the others?

PIZARRO

Needs must. But the men are played out.

[BALBOA *signs to* ARBOLANCHO, GARABITO, *and*

BOTELLO *to join him and* PIZARRO; *they advance.*]

ARBOLANCHO

What is moving, captain?

BALBOA

Hush! I must speak with you.

BOTELLO

I thought we were called to supper.

GARABITO

I'll give better counsel on a full stomach than on an empty one.

BALBOA

The moment is serious. 'Tis not to give you counsel or to take yours, but to warn you, that I call you. We are surrounded by Indian tribes, led by the chiefs Pacra and Poncha; they are now closing around us. (*Exclamations quickly stifled.*) Hush! don't alarm the men, poor devils let them eat a bite.

GARABITO

Much good may that stinking stew of mangy cur and palm shoots do them; they are fagged to death and there is no fight in them.

BALBOA

There is always fight in a Spaniard, Garabito.

ARBOLANCHO

Whence have you this news, captain?

BALBOA

Fulvia's brother has been here to carry her to a place of safety during the attack.

PIZARRO

Well, we must do the attacking.

BALBOA

Right, Francisco; we must strike first and strike hard. We fight or we die.

GARABITO

It will be both.

BOTELLO

Perhaps you will be safer with the women.

BALBOA

This is no time for wrangling, Botello. We know Garabito for a grumbler, but no one has ever seen him shirk. Now get the men in order, for fight we must.

PIZARRO

Without quarter.

BALBOA

We'll ask none nor give any. 'Tis the Indian fashion.

[*They separate amongst the men: instantly*

great activity prevails: men take their arms, dogs are put into their armour: different groups, each with a leader, are formed ready to march. PIZARRO *approaches* BALBOA, *who holds his great dog, Leoncino, fully caparisoned, in leash.*]

PIZARRO

God grant this fight may be quickly over. Our fellows are in a desperate plight: they won't hold out long.

BALBOA

If it is to be our last, then our bones will bleach on this new-found strand. Is yon hill my Pisgah to which I was led to view the promised ocean? No, Francisco, I can't believe it. God has led us so far for inscrutable purposes of His own. Are we not crusaders as well as soldiers? Upon every foot of land we win for Spain, we plant the cross of Christ. That southern ocean shall bear the message of salvation in Spanish ships to unknown races that people its virgin shores. Ah, no, Francisco, God has not led us thus far to quench now the flame of hope in the bitter waters of disappointment. (*Turning to the men.*) Comrades, one last fight before we descend to the shores of the ocean I have claimed for Spain. We fight under a holy and glorious standard. Keep well together and let there be no strag-

gling. Obey your leaders. Make every shot tell and send every thrust home. Victory hovers above us, ready to descend once more upon our consecrated banner. Now forward. For God, St. James and Spain!

[*Subdued repetition from the men: all march cautiously off, leaving the Indian women and porters behind.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

While the curtain remains down for a few minutes, sounds of firing, Indian war cries, Spanish shouts, bugle notes and the tumult of battle are heard. The curtain rises on the same scene. The stage is strewn with dead bodies, some Spaniards but mostly Indians. Other Spaniards are engaged in binding their wounds: the Indian women carrying water and assisting them. A number of Indian prisoners are led in bound, amongst them the wizard TUBANAMA, *an aged man with flowing hair and beard, wild of aspect and fantastically hung with amulets, etc. Spaniards hustle and threaten the prisoners.*

PIZARRO

Tie up these devils. We'll give them a taste of fire.

[*Half a dozen Indians are bound to small trees near together: as* TUBANAMA *is led forward the Indians shrink away from him: he looks fixedly at* FULVIA.]

FULVIA

[*To* BALBOA.]

Vasco, not him. (*Indicating* TUBANAMA.)

BALBOA

Why not, little one?

FULVIA

Him very old, very wise man. Him knows all things and see everything. Not die, not die.

BALBOA

He should know better than to attack Spaniards. Die he must.

FULVIA

No, no! He work you mischief with his great power, for he know all secrets and talk with devils. Dead men come when he calls and him see the end of the world.

PIZARRO

Ho, ho! A prophet is he? Well, let him now prophesy.

FULVIA

Oh, I very much afraid!

[TUBANAMA *has been tied to a tree with the others and wood piled high around all of them: torches are applied and volumes of smoke mount, almost concealing them.* TUBANAMA'S *head is always visible. Consternation amongst the Indians.*]

BOTELLO

Speak up, old man, and tell us what you see in the future.

ARBOLANCHO

Tell us our fortunes.

TUBANAMA

I see the end of all Spaniards in this land. . . . (*Laughter and cries of derision from the Spaniards.*)

PIZARRO

Finished up by your people, heh?

TUBANAMA

My people's day is done. Your people's day begins, but as we end so shall you. From out of the far North, from the great lands of ice and snow whence came our forefathers, shall come a race of white-faced conquerors. In great canoes they will come over the waters. Your canoes shall be as nutshells. Vast hosts will pour in upon you and possess your land and your treasures. You shall shrivel and perish before their oncoming as does the dry grass before the summer's heat. I hear their marching feet. Hark! (*A distant sound of marching is heard.*)

SPANIARDS

'Tis the sea. 'Tis the wind.

TUBANAMA

Hark! (*The Spaniards listen but hear nothing: they laugh derisively.*) I hear their music. Hark!

(*A faint, far away sound of "The Star Spangled Banner." The Spaniards listen again, but hear nothing and mock him.*)

SPANIARDS

What music dost thou hear?

TUBANAMA

The war music of a conquering host — a song of victory. I see their colours.

PIZARRO

His mind is going. Dying men see wild visions.

ARBOLANCHO

Where are their colours?

TUBANAMA

They paint the heavens from ocean to ocean. Look! (*Upon the darkening evening sky, the stars and stripes of the American flag are seen faintly shimmering. The Spaniards stare but see nothing.*)

SPANIARDS

The sky is red. The sky is white. The sky is blue.

[*The music dies away and the colours slowly fade. The flames rise about the prisoners.*]

TUBANAMA

Aye, 'tis red, 'tis white, 'tis blue: your conquerors' colours.

PIZARRO

Stop his raving. He sees and hears too much.

TUBANAMA

I see the day of vengeance for my people. I see the downfall of the Spaniards' power.

ARBOLANCHO

When?

TUBANAMA

When the waters meet. (*Spaniard laugh, shouting, "when, when?"*) When the oceans join and the South Sea is linked with the North.

BOTELLO

Enough of this foolery; stir up the fires.

BALBOA

Let the madman rave. His hour is at hand. Fall in now, we march to the sea shore and there we'll sleep. (*Spaniards laugh and shout: "When the waters meet! when the oceans join!" All fall into line; the wounded are carried or helped along. The Indians carry the baggage.* BALBOA *and the leaders in advance, the march begins.* FULVIA *and the women are last of all.* FULVIA *is about to mount her mule, carrying her baby, when* TUBANAMA, *to whom her brother* CARETA *has signalled from the shrubbery, calls her back. She comes reluctantly and fearfully, approaching him.* CARETA *rushes*

from his hiding place, snatches the baby and throws it into the flames at TUBANAMA'S *feet: stifling* FULVIA, *he carries her off into the forest: the Indian women shriek and scatter.* TUBANAMA *laughs.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

Beach of the Pacific; a strand of golden sand: a stretch of glittering, blue ocean, dotted with islands covered with graceful palms and tropical growth: the scene is one of idyllic beauty, lighted by the newly risen sun. A bugle blast without, after which BALBOA *and twenty-six of his troop enter: all gaze in silence, entranced, upon the view.*

BALBOA

Comrades, I call you now to witness the act by which I take possession of this ocean for Spain.

OMNES

Long live the King.

BALBOA

[*To notary.*]

Valderrabaño, record the act. Bring me my arms and the standard. (*He is clothed in full armour, with helmet; drawn sword in his right hand and the flag on which is painted a Madonna and Child and the royal arms of Spain, in his left. He advances knee deep into the water; dipping his hand, he sprinkles himself and makes the sign of the cross.* PIZARRO,

ARBOLANCHO *and* BOTELLO *follow him. The notary has his paper and quill ready and begins writing.*)

BALBOA

Long live the high and puissant sovereigns Doña Juana, Queen of Castile and Don Fernando, King of Aragon and Leon, in whose names I this day take real, corporal and actual possession for the royal crown of Castile of these seas, coasts and isles of the South, together with all that therefrom depends, whether kingdoms, provinces or cities. If any other sovereign or captain of whatsoever race or religion shall pretend to ownership or jurisdiction within these realms of sea and land, I stand ready to defend them in the name of the sovereigns of Castile, present and future. Let none dare to dispute the empire of Spain over these Indies, mainland and islands lying within or without the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, now and forever until the end of the world. Amen.

OMNES

Long live the King!

PIZARRO

For God, St. James and Spain.
[*Continued shouts of enthusiasm.*]

BALBOA

[*Drinks of the water.*]
Let this fair and untroubled ocean be forever

known as the Pacific, and this elysian gulf I dedicate to the honour of the Prince of the heavenly hosts . . . St. Michael.

OMNES

St. Michael forever!

[*Some of the men have meanwhile erected a rude cross of giant size on the shore;* BALBOA *approaches it; all kneel and intone Te Deum Laudamus.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE V

Same interior of BALBOA's *house in Darien as Scene I.*
BALBOA, PIZARRO *and* ARGÜELLO.

BALBOA

[*Seriously.*]
She disappeared the night we burned the Indian wizard, Tubanama. And since that hour she has not been seen; poor little Fulvia and her boy with the sunshine hair.

ARGÜELLO

Hither she did not return, else should I have seen her. I have never left Darien.

PIZARRO

Well, Vasco, now that she is gone, I may tell thee, I thought her looks a good deal overpraised; there are prettier girls than Fulvia in Darien; cheer up and take thy choice.

BALBOA

'Tis not that. The child loved me and after all her boy was mine. I wonder where and how she went.
[*Enter* BOTELLO.]

BOTELLO

Captain, the look-out reports vessels are doubling the cape.

BALBOA

What flag do they fly?

BOTELLO

The colours of Castile and Aragon.

PIZARRO

How many of them?

BOTELLO

In all, seven are now in sight.

ARGÜELLO

By the mass 'tis the governor's fleet.

[*A cannon shot is heard.*]

[*Enter* ARBOLANCHO.]

OMNES

The gun!

ARBOLANCHO

Two vessels have cast anchor, and from one a skiff is pulling shorewards.

BALBOA

Pedrarias for sure. None other would come with such a fleet. Arbolancho, return to the shore and welcome the landing party in my name. I follow.

[*Exit* ARBOLANCHO.]

PIZARRO

The fleet is more numerous than I expected.

BALBOA

Zamudio wrote fifteen hundred men: 'tis well we are back from Panama to meet them.

ARGÜELLO

My mind is not at rest: the coming of Pedrarias bodes ill.

PIZARRO

We need not receive him. I am ready for a fight.

BALBOA

Wrath of God, what art thou saying, Francisco? The man comes with the King's commission.

PIZARRO

We don't need to know that . . . until it's too late. I say fire on him. Keep him off till the news of your discovery reaches Spain. When King Ferdinand hears of the Pacific Ocean and its countless rich islands added to his realm, he'll recall Pedrarias and make thee governor of these parts. That is our only salvation.

ARGÜELLO

Pizarro is right, Balboa, the King will favour the successful, but in God's name, no violence, Francisco. We have already gone far, and news of our doings

has somehow reached Santo Domingo where they are calling us pirates and outlaws.

PIZARRO

Yes, that news was sent by Garabito.

BALBOA

Dost thou know this?

PIZARRO

By no proof in law, but I have suspicions. But he may rot for his pains. Let us drive off Pedrarias.

BALBOA

Thou wouldst counsel me to fire on the royal flag of Spain? 'Twere treason and would cost my head.

PIZARRO

All our heads are staked. We must defend them as we can. I don't trust that Pedrarias.

ARGÜELLO

What we most need is time. The law's delays are a proverb; meanwhile the news of Balboa's great achievement will reach the King.

BALBOA

[*Has meanwhile put on sash, sword, plumed hat and gloves.*]

I go to greet the King's governor for Darien.

PIZARRO

Vasco, thou art going to meet thy ruin. In this hour thy sun of glory sets. (*He draws his sword.*) Give the command, and Pedrarias and his men will be met with steel.

BALBOA

Sheathe and follow me, Pizarro; I prize more thy friendship than thy counsel.

[*They go out the door, but are met at once by Ayora, captain of* PEDRARIAS' *guard: a cannon shot announces the governor's arrival, sounds of distant shouting are heard, they all re-enter the room.*]

AYORA

I am Juan Ayora, lieutenant of the royal governor's fleet. His Excellency has landed.

[*All salute.*]

BALBOA

Sir, you are welcome. We were hastening to meet His Excellency.

AYORA

His lady, Doña Isabel, accompanies him.

BALBOA

The first Spanish lady of gentle birth to tread this soil. Our welcome will be hearty, but I fear that

all else will be wanting for so lofty a dame. (*Drum beat and noise of approaching crowd.*)

[*Enter* ARBOLANCHO.]

ARBOLANCHO

The governor is here.

[*Enter* PEDRARIAS, *leading* DOÑA ISABEL *and followed by numerous suite of richly-dressed nobles, including* QUEVEDO, *bishop of Darien, and one or two ladies attending* DOÑA ISABEL. *The soldiers of* BALBOA *crowd into the room; they are roughly dressed and make a sharp contrast to the Spanish courtiers; the two handsome leather chairs are quickly placed for* PEDRARIAS *and* ISABEL, BALBOA *advancing to meet them.*]

BALBOA

[*Saluting.*]

Don Pedrarias, I give you welcome in the name of this humble colony. (*He kisses* DOÑA ISABEL'S *hand.*)

DOÑA ISABEL

[*Aside to one of her ladies.*]

This man has manners. I expected to see a pirate, but he looks like a prince.

PEDRARIAS

The King — whom God guard — has given me the

governorship of this mainland. (*He signs to one of his suite.*) Read the royal commission.

BALBOA

Our most loyal obedience goes in advance to greet and to serve you. The reading of the royal commission, for our part, may wait your convenience.

PEDRARIAS

As you please. (*To notary.*) Let the King's commission be publicly read in the plaza and a copy thereof affixed to the church door.

1ST COURTIER

[*To companion.*]

Well, this is all very different from what I expected to see.

2ND COURTIER

No sign of gold or pearls. And this fellow, Balboa, I thought he lived in luxury and was served by a troop of ravishing Indian damsels.

1ST COURTIER

He is a fine figure of a man.

2ND COURTIER

So so, I don't like red hair, and his beard is not in the fashion.

1ST COURTIER

The fashion of Darien, perhaps. (*They laugh.*)

[BALBOA, PIZARRO *and others have meantime looked at the commission, the seal and signature.* BALBOA *kneels and touches his forehead with the commission; then kisses it.*]

BALBOA

This royal writing we accept as law and binding on our conscience. Gentlemen, Their Grace's Governor for Darien. Long live the King!

OMNES

Long live the King! (*All take the oath of allegiance.*)

ARGÜELLO

[*To* PIZARRO.]
Vasco is signing his abdication.

PIZARRO

May it not prove his death warrant!

BALBOA

I fear Your Excellency will find life rough enough in Darien, and most of all Her Excellency.

DOÑA ISABEL

I vow I like the place well enough thus far, but it is not as I thought to find it.

QUEVEDO

It seems hardly a colony of sufficient importance for one of Don Pedrarias' merits.

PIZARRO

A week ago 'twas a very pest hole of no importance, but Balboa has just recently changed all that. Darien will now become the centre of Spain's power overseas. (PEDRARIAS' *people all exclaim eagerly and crowd forward.*)

PEDRARIAS

[*Interested.*]

Say you then so? Has more gold been found?

DOÑA ISABEL

Or pearls? I am fond of pearls.

QUEVEDO

Or has the long-sought-for strait been discovered?

PIZARRO

No, none of these.

PEDRARIAS

Well what has been found?

PIZARRO

Water.

PEDRARIAS

[*To* BALBOA.]

Your companion seems to play the wit. What is the water he prates of?

BALBOA

The long-desired great South Sea. The ocean, of

whose very existence many were sceptical, lies beyond the mountain ridge to the south.

PEDRARIAS

Such reports are often spread; 'tis not well to be too credulous.

BALBOA

My lord, two months ago, this colony was on starvation rations, without hope of relief, for my appeal to the King remained unanswered and we waited in vain. The canker of idleness was eating the manhood out of us and despair settled stiflingly upon all. To save the men's lives, I organised an expedition for the discovery of the South Sea, with a friendly chief, Comogre, as our guide.

PEDRARIAS

Without the royal commission?

BALBOA

I had no choice — 'twas time to act or to die.

PEDRARIAS

A treasonable proceeding. Death is preferable to treason.

BALBOA

We were without news from Zamudio who had gone months before to report to the King and solicit the royal warrant and the necessary supplies for the

expedition. If I acted without the royal warrant, I also did so without drawing on the royal treasury.

QUEVEDO

That will please King Ferdinand.

PEDRARIAS

You put yourself outside the law. At that time, I was royal governor of Darien. I alone possessed authority to make discoveries.

BALBOA

The results may serve to justify my precipitation. I have added a boundless ocean to the Spanish dominions. Fair islands rich in spices and pearls.

COURTIERS

[*Eagerly.*]
Pearls! And gold?

BALBOA

Aye, the rivers run with gold. Moreover, I have brought twenty chieftains into subjection to the Crown, all of whom pay tribute in gold, pearls and foodstuffs for Spanish vessels and our colonists.

QUEVEDO

Magnificent!

PEDRARIAS

But irregular!

DOÑA ISABEL

I congratulate you, sir conqueror.

PEDRARIAS

Don't be over-hasty, my lady.

BALBOA

The revenue we now receive is as nothing to what will later pour in. We have hardly scratched the surface of our treasure-field. That ocean is the highway to Cathay and the eastern Indies, whence the Portugals draw vast wealth to the detriment of the Spanish power.

QUEVEDO

Vasco da Gama reached those lands by sailing around Africa to the east.

PIZARRO

And Vasco Nuñez de Balboa reaches them by a shorter way across the isthmus of Darien to the Pacific Ocean.

PEDRARIAS

Pacific Ocean? And who calls it thus, and why?

BALBOA

Thus did I name the south sea, because its waters are calm and untroubled, not like our turbulent Atlantic.

ARGÜELLO

It remains to discover the strait uniting the two oceans, through which ships may sail from one to the other.

QUEVEDO

'Tis not certain that God has made one.

BALBOA

Then must man make it.

QUEVEDO

Impossible!

BALBOA

'Twere in fact a great undertaking, but the isthmus is narrow and I think it could be done. Perhaps in some future day men will cut that strait through which the two oceans will mingle their waters.

QUEVEDO

What God has put asunder let not man join together.

PEDRARIAS

This smacks of presumption, nor are we now engaged with prophecies of what may or may not be done in future ages. Señor Balboa, complaints have been lodged against you, into which I am charged by the King and the royal India Council to inquire.

BALBOA

I stand ready to answer for my conduct. My conscience is clear of any fault towards Their Graces.

PEDRARIAS

So much the better for you. Meanwhile it is my duty to place you under arrest.

[*Exclamations and indignation. Some of the colonists draw their swords: courtiers do likewise.*]

PEDRARIAS

What do I see? Violence . . . rebellion against a royal governor? This bears out the evil reports that reach Spain concerning this colony.

QUEVEDO

[*Intervening.*]

In God's name, gentlemen, put up your swords. Would you do fratricide?

BALBOA

[*To his men.*]

Sheathe your swords. (*To* PEDRARIAS.) I surrender mine to Your Excellency. (*Gives his sword.*)

PEDRARIAS

Who is sheriff of this colony?

PIZARRO

I hold the office.

PEDRARIAS

Arrest Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.

PIZARRO

Per Dios . . . !

BALBOA

Sheriff, do your duty.

PIZARRO

I'll resign my office first.

PEDRARIAS

Disobedience! *Cuerpo de Dios!*

BALBOA

Do first thy duty and afterwards with thy office what thou willst.

PEDRARIAS

Strange ideas of discipline seem to obtain here! The sheriff flouts the governor and the prisoner orders his own arrest. But I'll soon change all that. Let the room be cleared. (AYORA *moves* BALBOA'S *men towards the door; they go reluctantly, grumbling audibly.*)

PEDRARIAS

Captain Ayora, furnish a guard, and you, sir sheriff, conduct your prisoner to gaol. I suppose there is a gaol, or are we here without the resources

of civilisation? (AYORA *tells off four armed men.* PIZARRO *awkwardly effects the arrest of* BALBOA.)

DOÑA ISABEL

[*To* PEDRARIAS.]
Don Pedro, is this necessary?

QUEVEDO

[*To* PEDRARIAS.]
Is not Your Excellency needlessly severe? Señor Balboa may be trusted to keep within his own doors on his parole.

PEDRARIAS

And foment rebellion in the colony.

DOÑA ISABEL

Nay, Don Pedro, the bishop is right. 'Twas Don Vasco who rebuked the rebellious ones.

PEDRARIAS

Meddle not in this affair. And you, my lord bishop, were sent hither to convert the Indians, not to hamper the royal officials in their duty. Keep to your spiritualities and don't encroach on my temporalities. I am governor here, and I'll have no dictation.

BALBOA

I claim the privilege of counsel and time to prepare my defence when the charges on which I am arrested shall be made known to me.

ARGÜELLO

[*Aside to* PIZARRO.]
This governor begins well.

PEDRARIAS

The law will take its course.

BALBOA

I ask no more than justice.

PEDRARIAS

It is my mission to execute justice. Sheriff, remove the prisoner.

[*Exeunt* BALBOA, PIZARRO, AYORA, *etc.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

The prison at Acla. A bare squalid room, with one heavily barred window high up in the wall: one low heavy door, centre-back; the light is dim and sombre; furniture sparse and rude. BALBOA, *in chains, is seated on a wooden bench.*

Enter AYORA. *He leaves the door ajar.* FULVIA *creeps stealthily in unobserved and conceals herself: she is in rags, pale, haggard and a very picture of misery.*

AYORA

Don Vasco.

BALBOA

Who calls me?

AYORA

Ayora.

BALBOA

My gaoler.

AYORA

Against my will, I do assure you: but I must do my duty.

BALBOA

I have not complained; nor do I blame any man who does his duty.

AYORA

Believe me, I would be your friend.

BALBOA

I reject no man's friendship, but I have no proof of yours.

AYORA

I am here to give you one. The bishop, Quevedo, who leaves Acla to-day to sail for Spain from Darien, would speak with you before he goes.

BALBOA

[*Starting up.*]
Well, I would fain see the bishop.

AYORA

'Tis contrary to orders, but I'll bring him to you.
[*Exit* AYORA.]
[FULVIA *creeps forward close to* BALBOA.]

FULVIA

[*Weakly.*]
Don Vasco.

BALBOA

Fulvia!

FULVIA

No, do not look. Fulvia is no longer Spanish lady; no more beautiful.

BALBOA

[*Embracing her.*]

How comest thou hither? Poor wretched child!

FULVIA

I walk through the forest long, long way from my father's house; no food and always afraid, oh Vasco! so much afraid.

BALBOA

[*Examining her.*]

What have they done to thee, poor child?

FULVIA

Careta, my brother, he catch me and take me back. There they beat me and make me a slave. Oh, Vasco, I no live without you.

BALBOA

And the baby Chachito, where is he?

FULVIA

Dead. Careta kill him: throw him in the fire where Tubanama burn.

BALBOA

The brutes. (*Sounds of the door opening.*) Ayora is returning; here conceal thyself. (*She lies under* BALBOA's *bed cover.*)

[*Enter* AYORA, *followed by* QUEVEDO.]

AYORA

I pray you, my lord, be brief. Were we discovered I should take Don Vasco's place.

QUEVEDO

A few short minutes suffice for what I have to say.

AYORA

I'll guard the door.

[*Exit* AYORA, *closing the door.*]

QUEVEDO

Don Vasco, I never thought to see you thus! I sail for Spain and shall carry with me your papers and the appeal Pizarro has addressed to the King.

BALBOA

I thank you, my lord.

QUEVEDO

The governor is inexorable. Deaf to reason and to prayers. Your sentence has been pronounced.

BALBOA

'Twas drawn up before my trial began.

QUEVEDO

You know it then?

BALBOA

No one has announced it to me, but I have known it from the beginning.

QUEVEDO

I will plead your cause before the King and the India Council. You must use your right of appeal. Gain time, and meanwhile the news of your great discovery will have reached Spain. The King will pardon . . . nay, he will reward you.

BALBOA

The governor will receive no appeal.

QUEVEDO

In law he is obliged.

BALBOA

In this colony 'tis he who both makes and interprets the law.

QUEVEDO

Not so, he is but a judge like any other.

BALBOA

He was sent here to be my executioner. Before you land in Spain, my soul will have gone elsewhere . . . may God receive it!

QUEVEDO

If your enemies are active, forget not that your friends are likewise so.

BALBOA

In this world hatred prevails over love. Evil is believed while good report falls on deaf ears. Each

slanderous word spoken by malicious or careless tongues weighs as a gospel text, and fools aid knaves to strip a man of his character. My ruin was decreed by the bishop of Burgos before Don Pedrarias left Spain. The governor came here to finish me. He dared not try me in Darien and hence I was brought here to Acla. Moreover, the task they set him suits Pedrarias well, for he is a man of petty spites and small jealousies. It is gall to him that I should have made my great discovery on the very eve of his arrival . . . snatching, as it were, the glory from him. You, my lord, have witnessed my trial. You know how flimsy was the evidence supplied by that prejudiced traitor, Garabito, whose vile life I might have taken had I dealt with him according to his deserts. My friends were excluded, or their testimony rejected, only slanderers and bribed witnesses admitted . . . faugh! I am nauseated with it all.

QUEVEDO

Nay, Don Vasco, all may yet be well with you.

BALBOA

Nor you, my lord, nor any man can serve me further in this world, but I beseech you, be zealous for the welfare of my soul.

QUEVEDO

My poor prayers are yours.

BALBOA

You now know the life we live here in this new world. We are not saints and I have many sins upon my soul.

QUEVEDO

Make your peace with God, my son, and fear not.

BALBOA

Only in Him do I now trust. Too much trust have I heretofore put in men, first of all in myself. When all else fails, the deluded soul returns to its Maker. One last service I would beg of you.

QUEVEDO

Command me.

BALBOA

Fulvia.

[FULVIA *comes forward.*]

Take this poor child into your care and place her in safety.

QUEVEDO

I'll take her safely to Spain.

BALBOA

She is a simple Indian maid. God forgive me the wrong I have done her. She loves me and has suffered for me. Poor child, I took her for my pleasure, the plaything of my idle fancy, and now in this

supreme hour, 'tis she who creeps back to my side to do me homage.

FULVIA

I stay with you, Vasco.

BALBOA

No, little one, here thou mayst not stay. The bishop will take thee to Spain, where thou shalt be a Spanish lady.

[*He embraces her and then forces her to go to* QUEVEDO: *the door opens and* AYORA *looks in.*]

FULVIA

[*Pleadingly.*]

No more Spanish lady now, only Vasco's little Indian girl. Stay with you, Vasco, with you.

QUEVEDO

Farewell, Don Vasco. You are paid the wage Spain pays her greatest servants — ingratitude, calumny and death.

BALBOA

I shrink not from death and my honour is safe with posterity. When history records these deeds, Pedrarias will be covered with infamy, but the name of Balboa shall live in imperishable splendour. Farewell. (*They embrace.*)

[*Exeunt* QUEVEDO, *leading* FULVIA, *who goes reluctantly, looking back at* BALBOA.]

CURTAIN

SCENE VII

Public square at Acla. In centre back rises the façade of the church; typically Spanish gable of arches à jour *containing bells. Houses around the square are low, modest buildings of adobe, washed with white, pink, yellow, etc., standing amongst tropical foliage of palms, cacti and flowering shrubs. To left centre front stands one superior to the others, having an upper balcony large enough for five or six persons: awnings, coloured blinds and green shutters on all houses. To the left back stands a low scaffold reached by some two or three steps, and entirely covered with black cloth; the block stands upon it. As the curtain rises, groups of people are discovered about the sides of the square, before the church, inspecting the scaffold, etc., some of whom are Spaniards, while others, more in the background, are Indian men and women. To the right front are friends of* Vasco's, *including* Arbolancho, Botello, Argüello.

BOTELLO

The falling night is sinister: see, the sun is already covered.

ARGÜELLO

Aye, what self-respecting planet would lighten such a foul deed as we shall witness.

ARBOLANCHO

What a terrible situation! Only the evidence of my own eyes and ears compels my credulity.

ARGÜELLO

And must we who have suffered under Don Vasco stand by and see him murdered by this stinking governor? *Madre de Dios!*

BOTELLO

I'll undertake to rouse the crowd and make a rescue.

ARBOLANCHO

That were possible in Darien, but Pedrarias has cunningly taken care to pronounce sentence here in Acla and to fill the town with his own men, while Vasco's friends are left behind, or have been sent on various pretexts, elsewhere. We are but a handful.

BOTELLO

I'll risk it. Where is Pizarro?

ARGÜELLO

Pizarro went to the governor this morning to deliver our memorial asking that the case be appealed to Spain.

BOTELLO

And Pedrarias?

ARGÜELLO

Refused.

ARBOLANCHO

It was to be foreseen. Nothing but Balboa's death will appease his rancour.

ARGÜELLO

He even refused Pizarro permission to see Vasco before the execution.

BOTELLO

The swine! Are we not at least Christians and Spanish subjects?

[*Enter* PIZARRO.]

ARBOLANCHO

Francisco! (BOTELLO *and* ARGÜELLO *greet* PIZARRO.)

PIZARRO

[*Moodily and with a despairing gesture.*]

There is nothing to be done.

BOTELLO

We can raise a riot. There is not a man of the colonists who is not for Balboa.

PIZARRO

You forget the sneak who condemned him with lies and pretended revelations.

ARGÜELLO

Garabito! Curse him!

PIZARRO

Aye, may his black soul sizzle for this. But there are other . . . Garabitos in this colony.

ARBOLANCHO

Pedrarias has men to out-number us. Besides, he *is* the governor. Rebellion comes high.

BOTELLO

Damn the price. I'll pay it willingly and take my chances.

PIZARRO

Hark! The bells.

[*The church bells begin to toll; a procession of the Misericordia brothers in dark grey gowns, cowled and masked, issues from the church door and, crossing the stage obliquely, exits right. The first man carries a smallish crucifix on a tall pole, each of the others an unlighted candle of yellow wax. The square has filled with people. The governor and* DOÑA ISABEL *appear on the balcony, left front, accompanied, and with two halberdiers on duty. The* EXECUTIONER, *wearing a black hood, black mask and draped in a long black mantle, enters and makes his way to the*

scaffold, where guards carrying halberds have taken their places. The people stand aside, shrinkingly, as he goes through their midst. Upon reaching the scaffold he takes off his cloak and stands, dressed in scarlet, resting his hands upon a large two-handed sword. The NOTARY, *dressed in black, takes his place under the governor's balcony. He is a thin man with a high monotonous voice.*]

NOTARY

Oyez, oyez, oyez! In the name of their most gracious Majesties, Doña Johanna, Queen of Castile and Leon, and of Don Fernando, King of Aragon, our sovereign lords, and by the authority of the most excellent Don Pedro Arias d'Avila, governor of the provinces of Darien and the mainland of this continent, sentence has been justly passed upon the person of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, a traitrous subject of their gracious Majesties, convicted after due process of full and legal trial. . . . (*During this recital* BALBOA'S *friends have been restless: others have joined them and loud murmurs are heard which find some echo in the crowd.*)

BOTELLO

[*Loudly and angrily.*]

Justice has miscarried. Balboa appeals to the Spanish courts.

[*Outcries, drowning the* NOTARY'S *voice.* PEDRARIAS *gesticulates furiously, seeking to be heard.*]

PIZARRO

[*Advancing towards balcony.*]

I call upon Your Excellency to note that these proceedings offend the sense of this colony. Balboa is innocent.

[*Voices cry:* "*Innocent, innocent!*"]

PEDRARIAS

[*Wrathfully.*]

How dare you, sir? How dare you disturb the decorum attending the execution of justice upon a guilty man?

SEVERAL

Balboa is innocent.

PEDRARIAS

He is guilty. He has had a fair trial and upon evidence he has been convicted.

BOTELLO

The kind of evidence that convicted Our Lord Christ.

PEDRARIAS

Blasphemer!

BOTELLO

Pilate! Wash your hands!

PIZARRO

The services of Vasco Nuñez to Spain and to this colony would entitle him to clemency even were there crushing proofs of the charges against him — and there are none.

PEDRARIAS

His services have been rewarded. For his crimes he must suffer.

PIZARRO

We protest against this unseemly haste. Balboa appeals to Spain.

PEDRARIAS

Silence, sir; this is rebellion. I'll have the lot of you in irons.

[*The bells have tolled at intervals. A roll of drums in the distance is now heard and the chanting of the Miserere. The Misericordia brothers now appear from the left, the cross-bearer in advance, the others in double file with their wax torches lighted, chanting. Several guards with halberds precede them, clearing the way: the people fall back and* PIZARRO *rejoins his friends at left front. Following the Misericordia come the drummers and more soldiers with pikes and muskets:* AYORA *is captain; last of all walks* BALBOA, *bare-headed, his hands tied in front of*

him. A friar walks with him carrying a crucifix and talking to him in a low, earnest manner. The Misericordia brothers group themselves between the scaffold and the church, centre back. PIZARRO *steps forward as* BALBOA *advances.*]

PIZARRO

[*With emotion.*]
Vasco!

BALBOA

Francisco, my friend. (*To the others.*) I thank you, my friends, for your sympathy.

PIZARRO

Oh, day of woe and calamity for Darien! When you leave us we shall quit this accursed spot where the noxious seeds of envy, malice and lies have blown the flower of judicial murder.

BALBOA

It comes to all of us to die and none of us may choose the manner nor the hour. It was written that I should die on a scaffold here in Acla. Therefore am I here.

PIZARRO

And 'twas I who brought you to your prison. God forgive me; I dare not ask your pardon.

BALBOA

You obeyed orders and I reproach no man for obedience.

PIZARRO

I should have known how it would end, save that I was a fool. Before God! Pedrarias tricked me into it.

BALBOA

You need not torment yourself. I know you for a friend. To you, Francisco, I bequeath a legacy of conquest — Peru, the golden land of the Incas. To me is denied the glory of bringing that kingdom under the Spanish crown and into the fold of Christendom. Peru . . . Peru . . . my dream! Yours shall be the reality. Farewell.

[PIZARRO *kneeling embraces* BALBOA *around the waist; the latter rests his bound hands upon* PIZARRO'S *head: rising, the latter kisses him on both cheeks.*]

PIZARRO

[*With emotion.*]

Farewell.

[*The others crowd forward and touch him with choked farewells.*]

BALBOA

Farewell, good friends. If I have failed to teach you how to live, please God I now may show you how to die.

[*He moves forward and mounts the scaffold. The soldiers close around so that only his head and shoulders are visible above their serried ranks. Night is drawing rapidly on and the scene is darkening.*]

EXECUTIONER

[*Kneeling.*]
Sir, I ask your forgiveness.

BALBOA

You do but your duty. (*Speaking to the crowd.*) Good people, I thank you all who are come here to see me end a life Almighty God has judged me no longer worthy to live. If there be any amongst you whom I have offended I crave forgiveness, and I beg you all to give my passing soul the charity of your prayers. I have much to repent, much evil that I cannot undo, but with the help of this ghostly friar I have made my peace with God and I go with serene conscience and untroubled heart to face the bar of His infinite justice,— of His infinite mercy. In expiation of my countless sins I lay down my life, but of the crimes charged against me and which have brought me on this scaffold, I protest my innocence.

[*Murmurs of sympathy in the crowd.*]

For what I have achieved, this end may seem a strange reward, for I have added to my sovereign's empire and I have given Spain a new ocean. Every

wave of the Pacific shall henceforth murmur my name,— Balboa; its every tide shall chant my eternal requiem. Were I a traitor doubly dyed, its blue waters should wash me clean. Traitor! The foulest word on human tongue. Treason! The most poisonous of human crimes! No lesser accusation would have sufficed, hence was this chosen for my undoing. I am but a plain soldier, defenceless against the intrigues of my enemies, but put a sword in my hand and I'll shout them a challenge from Panama to the Pillars of Hercules, and I'll slit their lying throats and send their perjured souls to nethermost hell. I appeal to Spain.

[*Murmurs, clamour and shouts of appeal, reprieve, etc.* PEDRARIAS *gesticulates furiously, leaning over the balcony and shouting orders.* DOÑA ISABEL *becomes hysterical and is led through the balcony window, weeping, by her attendants.* BALBOA *disappears in the struggling mass of soldiers holding the crowd back from the scaffold: the friar raises his crucifix and steps down: the headsman's sword rises and falls with a thud; a movement of horror goes through the crowd. A moment of profound silence follows. The headsman holds up a bloody head.*]

EXECUTIONER

Long live the King.

[*People turn their faces aside, crossing themselves;* BALBOA'S *friends clutch one another; a low sullen murmur of "Long live the King" answers the headsman's cry.*]

PIZARRO

[*Suddenly drawing his sword in the air, and in stentorian tones.*]

Long live Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, discoverer of the Pacific!

[*In a whirl of enthusiasm this cry is echoed.* PEDRARIAS *stops his ears and rushes into the house. A thrilling blast of bugles calls for order. Uproar and confusion.*]

CURTAIN

II

XILONA

A Pageant Drama of the Mexican Conquest

IN

FOUR ACTS

Speaking Characters of the Play, in the Order of Their Importance

MEN

Achel, *High Priest of Yucatan.*
Fra Geronimo, *a Franciscan Friar, prisoner at Labna.*
Xicotencal, *General of the Armies of the Republic of Tlaxcala.*
Guerrero, *known as* Holcan. *A Spanish soldier commanding the Indian forces at Labna.*
Xicotencal, *Regent of the Republic of Tlaxcala.*
Fernando Cortes, *known as "Malinche," an ambassador from Montezuma.*
Ahcunal, *Astrologer of Labna.*
Olarte, *a Spanish youth, prisoner at Labna.*
Villafañ, *a traitor.*
Alvarado, *a captain under Cortes.*
Ortega, Sanchez } *Two Spanish prisoners at Labna.*
An Indian Messenger of Cortes.
A Senator of Tlaxcala.
A Chamberlain.

WOMEN

Xilona, *Princess of Labna in Yucatan.*
Nezehua, *Her aunt.*
Marina, *Interpreter of Cortes.*

NON-SPEAKING CHARACTERS

Emperor Montezuma, Prince of Labna, Two Aztec Kings. Gentlemen of the Aztec Court. Captains under Cortes. Franciscan and Dominican monks. Spanish, Aztec, Yucatan and Tlaxcalan soldiers. Aztec priests and astrologers. Ladies of Princess Xilona. Citizens of Labna and Mexico. Dwarfs, albinos and human monstrosities of Montezuma's court.

ACT I

ACT I

TIME: April, 1519.

SCENE I.

Hall in the Palace of Labna: architecture reproduced from Uxmal. The hall is lighted by torches placed at intervals along the walls, which are hung with painted tapestries showing Indian divinities, battle-scenes, etc.

NEZEHUA *listens at the curtain over the entrance to the room where the Prince lies dying; with a gesture of anxiety she comes to the centre.*

NEZEHUA

How long, oh, lord of life? O lord of death, how long? Our city watches and our people pray while my stricken brother's life ebbs in a long agony.

[*Enter* AHCUNAL, *from Prince's room.*]

Well, Ahcunal, what news do you bring from the prince, my brother? How fares it?

AHCUNAL

Alas, lady, the gods of life and death will not be commanded; no skill of ours and no power of herbs our forests yield can stay the spreading infection of

his wound. Our counsels are no longer prized and the captive priest — the white man — is now summoned to replace us at the prince's bedside.

NEZEHUA

[*Hopefully.*]

Our people count him wise and they say he has wrought wondrous cures by his healing art; my brother listens willingly to him.

AHCUNAL

Too willingly by far. This crafty one has cunningly invaded the confidence of our people and the councils of our State. He mocks our gods and yet the people venerate him: in affairs of State, his advice is preferred to that of our most trusted elders. Since his companion, Holcan, has married our ruler's niece and assumed command of our army, the State of Labna is passing into the power of these vagabond strangers.

NEZEHUA

Holcan has led our armies to victory over our enemies and made safe our frontiers. As for the priest, I like not his talk about religion, but if his skill can save where yours has failed, then I say blessed be his name in Labna. But oh! what distressful welcome is this for our young princess, thus suddenly called from her convent shelter to take in her child-grasp the reins of government now slipping from her fa-

ther's failing hands! Even now the runners have come in advance of her litter, to announce her arrival in the city. Achel, the high priest, accompanies her. How shall I tell her this sorrowful news?

AHCUNAL

Fortunate indeed will be the presence of the great Achel, a man of singular wisdom and high courage; he will defeat the influence of these intriguing strangers in our State.

NEZEHUA

Achel has trained our young princess in the doctrines of our religion and in the science of government. She will take as her consort the young General Xicotencal, son of the regent of the Republic of Tlaxcala.

AHCUNAL

With General Xicotencal by our princess's side and the powerful Republic for her ally, Yucatan may become once more united and our royal house take the foremost place that by ancient right belongs to it. Achel will guard our temples and may we speedily see the end of foreign men and novel doctrines.

[*Enter* ACHEL, *leading* XILONA *by the hand.*]

NEZEHUA

My child! My dear child!

ACHEL

I bring hither Xilona, Princess of Labna.

XILONA

[*Embracing* NEZEHUA.]

My dearest aunt! What joy to see you again, were all joy not quenched in the dread that grips my heart! What news of my father?

NEZEHUA

Alas! His life ebbs swiftly, and you are but come to see him die.

[*They embrace and weep.*]

ACHEL

Earth is robbed that heaven may be adorned. The Prince of Labna is called hence by our gods to sit in the celestial council where his great ancestors are assembled awaiting him. Upon your shoulders, Princess, falls his royal mantle and on your brow sits his crown. Amidst the nation's lamentations, your tears must be dried; your part is to ascend serenely the vacant throne from whence to guide the destinies of your people.

XILONA

Filial grief, most reverend sir, will not be so promptly stilled. Leave me my tears and lead me straightway to my father. Six long years without seeing him — and now I find him but to lose him!

[*Sobbing, she is led away by* NEZEHUA.]

ACHEL

[*To* AHCUNAL.]
No arts have availed to save the Prince's life?

AHCUNAL

Our wisest healers have exhausted their skill in vain; night after night, have I sought guidance from the stars of the firmament, but no answer comes to my questioning. Such silence of the oracles bodes ill, I fear, to Labna.

ACHEL

Evil tidings roll up from all quarters like storm-clouds that foretell the approaching hurricane. Strange and portentous happenings are reported from divers parts of Montezuma's Empire, while everywhere our gods are silent. Here in Labna, I am told, reside five strangers,— pale-faced, bearded men whom the sea cast forth. It is even reported that one has married a princess of the royal house; while the other is a priest of some unknown faith, who preaches novel doctrines to seduce our people from the gods of their ancestors. While such blasphemy echoes in our very sanctuary, how shall our prayers be answered? Our prince has too lightly tolerated and even encouraged these unknown enemies of our race and faith, therefore offended heaven may take his crown and life.

AHCUNAL

The reports are true. Two of the five white strangers whom our prince keeps at his court have acquired dangerous influence in our State. The one called Holcan is a warrior, to whom none can deny qualities of bravery and skill in fighting. The other lives aloof from all human companionship, according to a rule of life to which his religion binds him, just as do the priests who serve in our temples. He has refused marriage and shuns women. Our prince has paid him high honour; so much so, that recently no decision was taken without this man, Geronimo, being consulted.

ACHEL

And has our prince listened to his blasphemies against the gods of Yucatan?

AHCUNAL

He declares he finds much conformity between the white priest's teaching and our own sacred writings.

ACHEL

There is here much food for reflection. Like the poison of the prince's wound, this venom needs to be arrested ere it spreads to the vitals of the nation and corrupts its very life. There has recently landed on the Totonac coast a white warrior called Malinche, with many followers, coming from the direction of the rising sun in great canoes, larger than houses

and that move on white wings before the winds of heaven and are subject to guidance. Strange monsters, one half resembling a man, and the other half a stag, form part of his company; and he brings engines of death that blaze forth thunder and lightning, destroying hundreds of men in an instant. No chief nor tribe has been able to withstand this captain's progress towards Mexico, where he seeks Montezuma. The Emperor is perplexed and, though sending ambassadors with words of welcome and costly gifts to the stranger, he has forbidden him to advance.

[*Enter a court* CHAMBERLAIN.]

CHAMBERLAIN

An embassy from the Emperor Montezuma is at the palace gates.

ACHEL

Deliver this news within; if our dying prince be too far gone to receive the embassy, then must the Princess Xilona begin her reign while her father still breathes.

[*Exit* CHAMBERLAIN *into Prince's room.*]

Now shall we speedily learn more of the foreign captain of whom I spoke, for I doubt not but that this embassy has to do with his movements. Montezuma, sorely troubled, is sending envoys to all his tributaries and confederates. There have been de-

fections; some whose suspected disloyalty only waited an opportunity to declare itself, have openly joined the invaders. The Totonac tribes are in rebellion against Mexico, and numerous smaller states do homage to Malinche and furnish him supplies. The Emperor himself is doubtful and, by his wavering, only augments the danger he should meet and crush while he still may.

[*Enter* CHAMBERLAIN *and others.*]

CHAMBERLAIN

Our prince thus wills to close his reign as he began it, with an act of homage to the great Montezuma.

[*Enter* AMBASSADOR, *accompanied by an Astrologer and suite, preceded by incense bearers; he carries a red rose in his hand.*]

ACHEL

[*Saluting* AMBASSADOR.]

Blessed be the consolation your distinguished visit brings to this city of mourning, my Lord Ambassador. I trust you are refreshed from the fatigues of your journey.

AMBASSADOR

I find my refreshment in your presence, most reverend sir. The Emperor has sent in my company this most learned magician whose celestial science has oft been proved, and whose singular power may procure the benefits of recovery to the wounded prince.

ACHEL

May the Emperor's solicitude be requited by our prince's restoration. Is all well in the empire of Montezuma?

AMBASSADOR

Disquiet and alarm pervade all Mexico because of the movements of certain mysterious men like unto none hitherto known in our country, whose captain is called Malinche.

ACHEL

We are not reassured in Yucatan by the toleration extended by the powerful Montezuma to this insignificant group of strangers whom he might crush with one decisive blow. Deign, sir, to explain the purport of the Emperor's intentions, that we may be inspired by his higher wisdom and conform our conduct to his lofty example.

AMBASSADOR

Conflicting counsels have bred perplexity in Mexico. Before disclosing active hostility towards Malinche, who represents himself as an envoy sent hither by a mighty king, to make acquaintance with our sovereign and his state, the Emperor would first assure himself of the support of vassals and confederates. Such is the purpose of my mission here. We are informed the prince harbours certain of these pernicious pale-faced men in his city and treats them

with distinction. The fact is disturbing, for it is clear their noxious presence offends the gods, whom they openly blaspheme, and menaces the State whose foundations they undermine.

ACHEL

I am of your mind regarding this, and since our prince's attachment to these insidious aliens resists the reasoning of his counsellors, we must invoke the pressure of higher powers. This learned astrologer may read in the signs set for our guidance in the stars of heaven some message that may convince our prince that the purchase of his own life may only be at the price of theirs. It were a wholesome revelation and a timely one.

[*Enter* XILONA, NEZEHUA *and others.*]

XILONA

My Lord Ambassador, I greet you from my father, who craves your presence instantly within, anticipating comfort from the pledge of confidence you bear him from the Emperor. We are not wont in Yucatan to greet the envoys of Montezuma with tears and sighs, but our city is weighed down with sorrow; apprehension freezes our hearts, grown strangers to joy. You will dispense us from offering you a festal welcome.

AMBASSADOR

Your speech is worthy of this place and hour,

May the gods grant that I leave Labna happier than I find it.

[*Exit into Prince's room, followed by his suite.*]

[*Enter* Fra Geronimo.]

AHCUNAL

Behold, here comes the man, Geronimo.

ACHEL

Ah!

NEZEHUA

[*To* Geronimo.]

Our people praise your healing power. Now is the time to use it. Will you not save our prince?

GERONIMO

Madam, my reputation exceeds my merits, for my skill is not great and the prince's state is grave. His wound is vital and past human remedy. I concern myself not for his bodily healing, but for the health of his soul. He has heard my words, and I pray that he may die a Christian.

NEZEHUA

[*Sarcastically.*]

A Christian? And wherefore shall the prince forsake the religion of his race in the hour of death, to follow a strange god who is powerless to save him?

GERONIMO

That he may go to heaven.

NEZEHUA

Will there be Spaniards in heaven?

GERONIMO

Yes, they all hope to go there.

NEZEHUA

Then the prince had better not; there is no heaven for us where Spaniards are.

ACHEL

The Mexican astrologer seeks guidance from the heavens, and the stars that govern the course of our prince's life will pronounce his salvation or his doom. Let us await his verdict.

GERONIMO

Vain are such star-questionings. All men must die, and each man, when his time is come, must render up his life and an accounting therefor. The prying of astrologers and sorcerers into the future is but a delusion; the stars are dumb and their pretended oracles are but cunning inventions to mystify the ignorant.

XILONA

[*Visibly impressed by* GERONIMO, *questions* NEZEHUA *aside.*]

Who is the wondrous stranger?

NEZEHUA

He is your father's captive from a land beyond the rising sun.

XILONA

[*Fascinated and musing to herself.*]

His head is crowned with gold! His face is fair as the lilies by the temple lake. (*She regards him with emotion.*) He is a child of the sun.

ACHEL

[*To* GERONIMO.]

Scorn not a science too high for your understanding; 'tis cheap condemnation. The heavens are the open scroll of the gods, whereon is written in planetary symbols the past and the future of the human race. You scoff, where you should reverence. Now, tell me, whence come you?

GERONIMO

From across the eastern sea; I come from the Catholic land of Spain. I and my companions escaped the perils of shipwreck and the yet fiercer dangers of man-eating savages before we found refuge here in Labna. Six years ago our caraval was dashed to pieces upon the treacherous reefs of Jamaica, during a black night of wild tempest against which no ship could battle. The seething waters engulfed us all and many perished, but when the hurricane subsided and dawn broke over the tragic

scene, some twelve of us survived, clinging with desperate, stiffening fingers to the one ship's boat that floated. For days and days beneath the merciless sun that blazed upon us from a firmament of brass, we drifted helplessly,— rudderless and without oars or tackle to steer our course, or sail to profit by the winds. We sought in the stupor of sleep some respite from the invasive agonies of starvation; but with sleep came dreams, and we wakened raving. From man no help could come, and God, on Whom we called unceasingly, seemed deaf or forgetful of His creatures. When the extremity of human endurance was reached, our frail boat was caught by a merciful current that carried it to the coast of Yucatan, where a fresh stream of sweet water flowed into the sea and life-saving fruits hung in abundance from the trees. We were brought here to Labna, where the beneficent prince has sheltered us.

ACHEL

A marvellous tale, full of strange incident.

XILONA

It is a pitiful tale that wrings the heart. I am glad my father showed compassion.

NEZEHUA

He tells his story well — but who knows if it be true? — tales of the sea!

ACHEL

And what religion do you preach?

GERONIMO

I bring a gospel of love and peace and joy. As one God created the earth and all mankind, so are we all children of one divine Father and hence are brothers, and bound to love one another. For, in the beginning God placed a man and a woman in a garden of beauty and plenty, where they were happy until through the woman came the sin of disobedience into the world. And with sin came suffering and all miseries; love was turned into hatred, joy into mourning and plenty was replaced by want. To save our fallen race the Son of God took to Himself our human nature and came amongst us, humbly, as a little child born of a virgin; His own received Him not, but reviled and persecuted Him, putting Him to a shameful death upon the cross, which is now the emblem of our salvation. His was the all-sufficing sacrifice by which each fallen soul has been redeemed, and which is perpetuated in the bloodless Eucharist. To the chief of His apostles, St. Peter, and to his successors forever, our Lord gave the mission to subdue all the human race under His sweet yoke. In Rome, the chief city of the whole world, is fixed the pontifical chair, from whence radiates the saving light of Christian teaching; and I, the least of the servants of the

Church, am cast by a strange destiny upon these distant shores, to institute here the sacraments of our faith by which all may become good and pure and merciful in this world, and attain eternal bliss in the world to come.

ACHEL

In all this I perceive no new doctrine, nor any higher rule of life than what we have received from our forefathers. By our law it is sinful to kill, to steal, to defraud, to covet the goods or the wife of another. We confess our sins with humility and do penance in expiation thereof. We are commanded to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and to visit the sick, remembering that all men are one flesh and brothers. We adore one supreme god and creator of all things and we have his law by which we shall be saved and forever united to him. To him we offer sacrifice, for to the lord of life, is life due.

GERONIMO

The devil apes holiness, the better to beguile unwary souls to destruction; throughout this land, unclean altars reek with human blood; hourly the cries of the victims, slaughtered in Satanic orgies, call for vengeance on the ministers of these inhuman rites. O God! Why dost thou allow the devil to be so honoured in this fair land!

ACHEL

You proclaim yourself a man of peace, but your kinsmen invade our neighbouring states with the fury of devils and an insatiable greed for riches, like unto the ravening hunger of wild beasts. You discourse of love and purity while they bring us hatred and lust. The evidence of your doctrine is hard to find in the practices of your countrymen. Your pontiff enthroned in distant Rome we know not, for I am pontiff in Yucatan; but we know the Spaniards' god — his name is gold. (*Mockingly.*) Hallowed be thy name, O gold! We have parrots in Yucatan who talk better sense than you.

NEZEHUA

Don't talk to him. These wranglings over religion are wearisome. Each nation has its own gods, and surely ours are as good as any others. Novelties in religion should be discouraged.

XILONA

His speech is strange, but I like his words. I would speak with him and hear more.

NEZEHUA

Do not speak with him; or, if you must, bid him be silent and stop insulting our gods. It brings bad luck.

ACHEL

You must not speak with him. He is a prisoner and a blasphemer.

XILONA

It is my will to speak with him — alone. (*Motioning the others aside, she approaches* GERONIMO.) You are the messenger of a new god?

[ACHEL *and* NEZEHUA *retire to one side watching suspiciously.*]

GERONIMO

I am the messenger of the supreme and only God, Who is not new, but is from the beginning and for all eternity; His law is love.

XILONA

[*Ecstatically.*]

His law is Love! The god of love is supreme, and you are his messenger to me. Do you bring me love?

GERONIMO

Divine love that passeth understanding; not the baser passion men know, but the love of holiness that endureth forever.

XILONA

[*Puzzled.*]

Not man's love? I do not understand. Will you teach me this new love?

GERONIMO

Willingly. Such is my mission.

XILONA

I have listened to your speech with Achel. Three days' journey from here, in the depths of the forest, there stands a holy temple where I have ministered as priestess at the shrine. While there, I chanced upon an ancient book, wherein are written things of our religion — of the religion of our earliest forefathers — very like to what you told him. In that ancient book, it is written that human sacrifice is abhorrent to the creator of all things; the early law of our religion knew no sacrifice of men but commanded that fruits, flowers and honey should be laid upon the altar, while the sweet smoke of incense bore heavenwards our prayers. Later, when our temple rites came under the rule of the Aztec priests, were human sacrifices first ordained. (*She produces book.*) Now listen to this prophecy on which I have often pondered. (*She reads.*) "At the close of the thirteenth age of the world, the sign of the Lord of the sky will appear and the cross will be seen by the nations of men. Receive well the bearded guests who are coming, for they shall be as fathers and brothers to you." We are now in the thirteenth age. What say you?

GERONIMO

This wonderful book speaks the truth, and the workings of God's spirit are mysterious. This message is divine and was delivered to your people by a sage of olden times, inspired like the prophets of Israel or the sibyls of the Gentiles. To you is the message; you see the light, Princess! The voice of nature and the voice of God speak to your soul. Hear them and obey.

XILONA

I am but a girl. What can I do against the priests?

GERONIMO

You are a princess, and you will shortly rule this land.

XILONA

In things of religion the ruler must obey the priests.

GERONIMO

Your priests are slaves of the devil and teach the lies of hell. You are the shepherd of your people and must defend them against the ravening beasts that feast on their flesh and blood. Achel is Satan incarnate.

XILONA

Achel is powerful. All Yucatan pays him reverence, and I — I fear him, I fear him much. Even the

dead hear and obey his voice. (*Enter* AMBASSADOR, ASTROLOGER *and his suite.*)

[*To* AMBASSADOR, *indicating the* ASTROLOGER.]

Does this wise man read good or evil in the oracles of heaven?

AMBASSADOR

The stars have answered his questioning. Their message is clear, and gives hope for your father's life. The gods of Anáhuac are offended by the sacrilegious presence of their enemies in Yucatan. Your father has sheltered blasphemers against our faith, and hence he is stricken. Penance and sacrifice are required to appease the wrath provoked against the land; otherwise your father's life is forfeited.

XILONA

What is to be done?

AMBASSADOR

Your father has ordered the sacrifice of three white captives at dawn.

ACHEL

[*Triumphantly.*]

Only thus will the favour of the gods return to Yucatan and Mexico.

XILONA

[*Starting and looking toward* GERONIMO.]

And this man —?

AMBASSADOR

Not he, but three of his companions.

ACHEL

Not he? (*Significantly.*) Not yet!

XILONA

Must this sacrifice be offered? Is there no other way?

AMBASSADOR

The gods so will it; the stars have answered, and at dawn the captives die.

[*Exeunt all, save* GERONIMO *and* XILONA.]

GERONIMO

Will you permit this hideous massacre in the name of religion? Shall my hapless companions thus die in obedience to the murderous intrigues of these false priests? The truth stirs your soul and cries aloud to you. Oh, be heedful to its voice and stop this crime.

XILONA

[*Distressed.*]

But my father's life! If it is to be thus saved then am I powerless against this decree.

GERONIMO

Nothing can prolong your father's life an hour, for he will die before another sun has set. This is but

a plot between the Mexicans and Achel to destroy my companions — and also me, could they but compass it. Go you to your father, plead with him; get this decree revoked. He does not seek our death — he is overborne by the priests. (*He kneels to her.*) See! I kneel to implore this mercy.

XILONA

When I look upon your face and hear your voice, I can refuse you nothing. I care naught for the words of Montezuma's astrologer. My father's spirit goes hence and I shall reign in Labna. You have been his prisoner but I will give you liberty, I will make you a free man. Freedom is sweet; it is like strong wine in the veins, it is like the wondrous air of high mountain tops.

GERONIMO

It is for my countrymen I plead; give life and freedom to them!

XILONA

I do not yet rule here. I must beg my father to let them go hence; perhaps he will not refuse me. And you, love's messenger, you will remain with me and together we will teach my people the pure religion of olden times.

GERONIMO

Save my countrymen, and I will do all you ask.

XILONA

I ask you to rise and stand by my side; I ask you to cast off that rough garment and drape your form in soft stuffs woven in fair colours and threads of gold. I ask you to set upon your hair a circle of turquoise to match the azure of your eyes. I ask you to bind golden sandals on your feet, and clasp their scarlet thongs with topaz. I ask you to sit beside me on my tiger-throne of jade —

GERONIMO

[*Interrupting.*]

Princess Xilona, you must not speak these words to me — I may love no woman, for I am a priest forever and am consecrated to higher things. Name not such conditions.

XILONA

You have promised to teach me love. You are the messenger of the god of love. Your god and mine, are they not the same?

[*Exit into Prince's room,* GERONIMO *looking after her.*]

SCENE II

The next morning.

Before daybreak. In the centre of the stage is a pyramidal structure on which stands the temple.

Sacred fires burn before the arched entrance, through which a great idol and a stone of sacrifice are perceptible. Background is a city amidst a tropical forest of palms and gorgeous flowering trees, etc.

FRA GERONIMO *is standing to one side, with clasped hands in prayer.*

Enter Indian messenger from CORTES. *He unties a letter carried in his hair and gives it to* GERONIMO.

MESSENGER

I bring this from the great captain, Malinche.

GERONIMO

[*Reading.*]

A letter, a Spanish letter! A ship sent by Fernando Cortes awaits us at the river's mouth — liberty once more. and amongst my own people! (*To the Messenger.*) You have a boat?

MESSENGER

My canoe is concealed near by; it will carry six men. I come from the great ship where Malinche commands the waters and the thunder and lightning. I am ready to take you there.

GERONIMO

One day too late! Just heaven! my luckless companions are led to death while I go back to life!

[*Enter* GUERRERO.]

[*Calling him.*]

He at least may be saved. (*Showing him the letter.*) A Spanish captain called Fernando Cortes has arrived off the coast with a fleet of ships from Cuba, and sends his letter by this Indian, whose canoe will take us safely to the vessel that awaits us at the river's mouth.

GUERRERO

[*Gloomily.*]

I will not go. Look at me — my tattooed face — am I a Spaniard? No, I am Holcan, a Maya. Here in Yucatan I command armies; I have a wife of the ruling house, I have two boys whom I love. Is it better to hunger and thirst among Spaniards than to feast on plenty with Mayas?

GERONIMO

Spain is your mother and Spaniards are your brethren. Will you forsake your Christian heritage to live amongst heathen cannibals?

GUERRERO

I will not go. A sorry mother was Spain to me; my Spanish brethren were my masters, I their slave. The first I knew of liberty, of kindness and of love, I learned here amongst these heathen. Look you, Fra Geronimo, am I not a husband and a father? Neither religion nor nature counsel me to desert my wife and boys. In all the wide world, there is no

living being who cares for me, save only them. God gave them to me, and I must keep them. I will not go.

GERONIMO

Think on the fate of our companions who die at dawn on Satan's altar. Can you witness this ghastly sacrifice unmoved, and still live on amongst these devil-worshippers who feed on Spaniards' flesh? Neither your wife nor your sons can you save — for they are pagans; — come away with me, to your own kind, to our country's service and to our God.

GUERRERO

Go you, friar, if you will, but I stay here. I will not be a thing of mockery amongst Spaniards. And ere we part forever, give me a solemn pledge. The Spaniards must never know of my existence. I am no longer one of them. You and I have shared dangers together and I have saved you from death. Now pay your debt. Swear upon this cross (*he grasps the crucifix hanging from* GERONIMO's *girdle*) that you will never speak my name to this Spanish captain and his men.

GERONIMO

[*Sadly.*]

Since you will not come, it is better they should never know. (*He kisses the crucifix.*) I swear to keep your secret. (*To the messenger.*) Have your canoe ready, and I will join you within an hour.

[*Exit messenger.*]

[*The* PRINCE *is carried in on his litter with* XILONA *and* NEZEHUA, *all his court surrounding him. They take their places. The Aztec Ambassador and his suite appear; at the back and all around the sides of the great pyramid, people group themselves, representing a large crowd, to assist at the ceremony. Several minor priests are on the pyramid busy with preparations. The great drum is beaten solemnly.* FRA GERONIMO *remains alone, opposite the court group, at the foot of the pyramid. Sounds of chanting and religious music of drums and trumpets are heard announcing a procession, which comes on. It consists of priests of all grades, in their proper vestments and carrying idols, religious emblems and banners; young men and girls strew flowers before them. Finally* ACHEL, *in full pontificals, appears, behind whom the three Spanish* CAPTIVES, *wearing garlands and led by chains of flowers. Otherwise they are as naked as public prejudice will allow.* ACHEL *mounts the steps of the pyramid with great dignity, and is received by the waiting priests at the top. Some ceremonies with incensing of the idol, etc., follow; after which he advances to the top of the stairs and calls for the victims to be*

led up. These men are two distinct types; the first is a simple, pious man of the people, a sailor. As he passes FRA GERONIMO, *he halts and kneels.*]

1ST CAPTIVE

[*To* GERONIMO.]

Thy blessing, friar. In distant Palos my mother prays and waits for me, but I shall never come. (*He takes a medal from his neck.*) She gave me this. Take it, and some day, if you may, give it back and tell her —(*He breaks down, sobbing, and is led up to the temple steps, disappearing into the arch of the sanctuary.*)

[*The second is a rough, devil-may-care type of fellow; of no family, with no ties, and no religion.*]

GERONIMO

[*Stopping second captive.*]

My son, do you go unshriven to death?

2ND CAPTIVE

[*Laughing recklessly.*]

Keep your doggerel for less knowing ones, friar. Unshriven have I lived, unshriven I shall die. Spain. . . . Oh, Spain! Ten thousand curses on her and on her people! I was kidnapped and shipped hither; for ten years I have roamed the seas and islands of this western world, kicked and cuffed and starved by

Spaniards. These Indians have at least fattened me, so now let them eat me. No shrivening for me, friar, and a plague on you and on your prayers! (*He swaggers up the steps and disappears within.*)

[*Last comes* OLARTE, *a boy of eighteen, and* FRA GERONIMO'S *favourite, whom he has trained and taught. He tries to bear up, but the sight of the fate of the other two has unmanned him. He breaks from his leaders and rushes to* FRA GERONIMO, *throwing himself at his feet, burying his face in his robe and begging hysterically for protection.*

GERONIMO

My son, this is the most glorious day of all thy brief life. It witnesseth thy election to a place in that noble army of martyrs whose blood has ever been the seed of the Church. From the miseries and uncertainties of this poor world, thy spirit is now called hence in no ordinary or ignoble manner, but by a divine invitation, for which all generations of Catholic men shall name thee "blessed." How many of thy companions hast thou seen end their unprofitable lives obscurely, even without the last consolations of our holy religion to purge their souls from the stains of their crimes? How many furnished food for the monsters of the sea? How many were torn and devoured by beasts and birds of prey? How many have perished miserably of fevers and

wasting diseases? (*He raises* OLARTE *to his feet and stands him apart; then, falling on his knees before him.*) Hail, Christian martyr! Pour out thy young blood joyously and generously upon the pagan soil of this new world from which millions of witnesses to our holy faith shall spring — a rich harvest from thy fruitful seed, nobly sown! Through thy sacrifice to-day is the power of the demon shattered in this land, and yonder blood-stained shrine of Satan transformed into the pearly gates of paradise! I see upon thy brow the sacred sign of God's chosen ones and about thy young head burns the radiant nimbus of His Saints. Bless me, His unworthy servant, ere thou goest hence to wear the martyr's crown, for thou art chosen and I am left!

[OLARTE *bends forward and embraces him; then, with his face radiant and full of enthusiasm, he steps forward alertly, quickly ascends the steps and, on reaching the top, he turns, signs himself, stretches aloft his arms and cries* —]

OLARTE

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

[*He disappears into the temple and is sacrificed.*]

[*Enter* CORTES' *Indian Messenger, approaching* FRA GERONIMO *and speaking to him aside.*]

MESSENGER

My boat is ready and it is now time; for before the sun marks noon we must be out at sea. Come away quickly while all here are engaged in the sacrifice. I shall await thee in the ceiba grove.

[FRA GERONIMO *nods assent. Exit Messenger.*]

[ACHEL *emerges from the sanctuary, bearing a golden salver, on which are three smoking hearts. He solemnly elevates them towards the rising sun with hieratic gesture.* ALL (*save* GERONIMO) *fall on their knees; clouds of incense salute the elevation; also chanting and the sound of the great drum. The stage is now bathed in brilliant light, with cloud effects of dawn.*]

[*Pronouncing in chant tones the prayer of the offertory.*]

ACHEL

Oh, almighty creator of all things, by whose providence we are sustained and preserved, and who givest life unto mankind, grant unto us thy servants out of thy singular bounty all our needs, that we may enjoy thy clemency, sweetness and love; have mercy upon us and open the hands of thy pity above us. Thou who art all powerful to destroy the heavens

and the earth, look down in mercy upon these, thy people, and vouchsafe to accept their sacrifice and to lead them by ways of purity and penance unto life everlasting.

[*He descends the steps, accompanied by the* PRIESTS *who support his robes, and approaches first the* PRINCE, *whose attendants carefully raise him upon his litter.*

All merciful God, who knowest the secrets of all hearts, consider not, we beseech thee, the sins of thy people by which, in the weakness of their flesh and will, they have offended thee and merited thy punishment, but rather accept their tears of repentance and let thy pardon descend upon them like sweet waters rained from heaven to wash away the stains of their sins. (*Giving him the flesh.*) Receive this the very true flesh of our God for the healing of thy soul unto the life everlasting.

[*A small piece is administered to the* PRINCE, *whose head droops and rolls weakly; next to* XILONA, *who hesitates, shows some repugnance, but receives it finally on her tongue.* FRA GERONIMO *has watched her with suppressed excitement, striving almost to hypnotise her.*]

GERONIMO

The curse of Rome upon your soul for all eternity! For this filthy travesty of a holy rite, shall

you pay the price, Princess of Labna! Like Jezebel of old, whose blood was lapped by dogs, shall you be brought low; for as you have fed on human flesh, so shall your body furnish food for vultures.

[XILONA *shrinks and cowers as she hears this prophecy.* ACHEL *has meanwhile approached* GUERRERO, *who kneels with the others, but just as he is about giving him the communion* FRA GERONIMO *rushes forward in a frenzy of indignation, dashes the golden salver to the ground and, standing menacingly over* GUERRERO, *cries,*]

Oh, what monstrous and inhuman sacrilege do my eyes behold! Thou foul and loathsome beast, by what devil begot and in what vile slime wast thou spawned to feed upon the flesh of thy fellow men! I knew thee for a traitor and a renegade! I suspected thee for an apostate, but not while I stand here shalt thou become a cannibal. A lower circle is to-day created in nethermost hell to house thy unnatural soul — Go hence and tenant it!

[*He strikes* GUERRERO *to the earth. Great outcries and confusion follow. The* PRINCE *dies, and* FRA GERONIMO *rushes off after the messenger.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

Time, two months later. At sunset.

Scene I

Xilona; Nezehua; Achel.

The garden of the palace at Labna. Tropical foliage, orchids, flowering creepers, etc., amidst which are perceived one or two characteristic images of gods richly carved; pyramids and towers of the city seen beyond the garden wall. To the left front is a marble seat, over which a rich canopy, like a huge parasol, is suspended from a bough; on the ground before the seat are spread leopard skins, and part of a fountain basin is seen, in which are swans, and rose-coloured flamingoes. The Attendants, two or three women and young pages, are grouped at some distance in the background at the right.

Xilona *is seated under the canopy, reading a book.* Nezehua, *seated on a leopard skin, embroiders.*

NEZEHUA

Listen to the song of the coyol-bird. Now I wonder what he says.

XILONA

That golden-throated coyol-bird tells me each day what flower has bloomed in my garden for my delight. He is the voice of the flowers, for the flowers cannot speak to us — they only whisper to one another.

NEZEHUA

Is he not rather the voice of love?

XILONA

[*Impatiently.*]
I do not think of love.

NEZEHUA

No? But is it not at sunset you are to see Xicotencal and fix your marriage day?

XILONA

It is not yet sunset, and I don't want to talk about that. Marriage does not interest me.

NEZEHUA

A wise woman interests herself in the inevitable — at least to the extent of preparing for it. Achel has surely made you understand that your marriage is inevitable?

XILONA

What does Achel know about marriage — or — or love? He has never loved anybody, not even him-

self. Achel is not a man — he is a power. (*She reads.*)

NEZEHUA

Why do you weary your eyes over that ancient writing, Xilona? It seems to bring you no comfort, but great disquiet. It must be poetry.

XILONA

No, it is not poetry — it is prophecy. There are many wonderful things written in this book — things our people no longer know and which the priests keep from them. In those early days when our forefathers built the great Maya cities, our altars were unstained by human blood. There is a prophecy in this book, which says that those times shall return once more and the pure worship of one supreme god be established again by men who, like our first ancestors, should come from the rising sun. Listen. (*She reads from the book.*) "And Quetzalcoatl prophesying said: Because this people is not worthy to receive my message, I go hence to my master in the land of Tlapallan, but my followers, like unto me, shall hereafter come and smite this perverse nation and destroy it. They shall overturn its altars, polluted with human blood, and restore the religion I have taught."

NEZEHUA

It sounds quite revolutionary, and I hope it won't

happen in my time. It is not well for women to torment their minds about such matters. The interpretation of prophecies is for the priests — not for us.

XILONA

I am not only a woman, I am also a princess.

NEZEHUA

The government of your state is surely care enough, without prying into prophecies.

XILONA

I believe the hour of their fulfilment is at hand. Men have come to us from beyond the rising sun: men like gods, who teach the very things the prophecies foretell. Never shall I forget that morning at the temple! That youth, who seemed to rise like a spirit of the dawn, on wings of light, upon whose head there rested a radiance not of this world. And Geronimo, the captive priest, how he burst into the ceremony and, with magnificent fury, struck Holcan to the earth! He seemed a sun-god.

NEZEHUA

Yes, and cursed you before all the people, the insolent vagabond! Call you that the fulfilment of prophecies?

XILONA

Yes, he cursed me and said — oh, what horrible

things he said to me! Will they come true? Nezehua, do you think the horrible things he said will come true? Is he a prophet?

NEZEHUA

I have heard too many prophets rave to have much faith in them. It is best not to listen to prophets, for they always say uncomfortable things. Things that are quite wild and better not heard.

XILONA

But the vultures! the black vultures that are to tear my flesh! I seem to hear the rush of their wings over my head, and when a shadow falls across my path, I am startled and look to see those birds of evil hovering above me. Three times have I dreamed I lay as a dead woman lies — white and cold, with glassy, staring eyes — but eyes that could see — could see the great black bird with outstretched wings, dropping silently like a pall upon my body — I could see but could not cry out. Almost I felt the beak dig into my heart! Ah, Nezehua, will this come true?

NEZEHUA

[*Comforting her.*]

No, no, my sweet. How can such cruel sayings come true? Oh, could I but put my hands upon that man Geronimo! I always knew some evil would

come of his presence amongst us, and I begged your father to get rid of him.

XILONA

I have tried to hate him, but I cannot. His wrath was divine, and so exalted his beauty I could have thrown myself at his feet before everybody. But I ought to hate him — I will hate him, for he has gone and left me with no one to guide me, just when I most need him.

NEZEHUA

No one to guide you! Why, child, what do you say? Achel is with you.

XILONA

[*Wearily.*]

Achel! Achel! I have come to fear him. Do you think Achel is a good man?

NEZEHUA

I don't know about him being a good man — he is a good priest.

XILONA

He wields a power over me I cannot fathom, and he sways my will by the glance of his piercing eyes. He seems to read my very soul; while in his presence all my thoughts scatter like dead leaves before the breath of a hot wind. Do you know? — he sees things that happen far away and he hears voices to

which we are deaf. By power of magic he can control the elements, raise tempests, blight crops, bewitch men's wits and foretell the future. When he speaks, all obey — aye, even the dead must come when he summons them.

NEZEHUA

Well, that is his business, for he is a priest, and all the more reason why you should keep him for your friend. But I don't like this calling back the dead, and if I were you I would make a law forbidding it. Just think if this practice became general! See! We speak of him, and here he is. (*Indicating the garden entrance.*)

[*Enter* ACHEL *by the garden door.*]

ACHEL

[*Saluting.*]

Outside the gates of your fragrant bower there paces with restless tread your lover, Xicotencal. To-day at sunset you promised him his answer. Shall he enter?

XILONA

[*Sighing.*]

It is not yet sunset. I like him well, Xicotencal — and yet — Oh, I don't want to talk about marriage.

ACHEL

Where amongst the peoples of Yucatan and all

Anáhuac will you find his peer? Is he not the noblest formed amongst men? His lithe, sun-kissed body is like the silken flanks of the deer; his raven hair falls like a mantle of night above his noble brow, and his eyes, now tender as the gentle doe's, now flashing as the eagle's piercing orb, are fit to woo a queen or rule a nation. He is a fit mate for any princess living. In war, he is the leader of his people; in peace, their trusted counsellor.

XILONA

You have not half numbered his qualities and yet you weary me. I know he is a great warrior who only lacks a crown to be a king.

ACHEL

You have the crown, and your people cry for a king. Alone you cannot rule. The nation has bowed to your dead father's behest and placed his crown upon your brow; be you likewise obedient to his will, and take the husband he destined for you.

XILONA

But is there need for haste? I am very young; but a few weeks have passed since my father's death. I am all disturbed, overwrought and ill at ease. I cannot think of marriage.

ACHEL

[*Sternly.*]

Great need is there for haste. There is a busy

ferment throughout the empire of the Aztecs. The Castilian invaders advance despite Montezuma's prohibition; traitorous vassals and unfaithful allies secretly abet Malinche. Shall we in Yucatan sit supinely by and see our kinsmen conquered and enslaved by these sacrilegious strangers? The republic of Tlaxcala has not yet declared itself, and the young general Xicotencal comes not only as your bridegroom to claim your hand, but likewise as an ambassador from the regents of the republic to solicit your alliance. The fate of Yucatan, of Tlaxcala — nay, even of great Mexico itself, hangs in the balance your untried hand sustains. Dally no longer; accept his proffered love; cement this alliance with the republic and send your enemies under Xicotencal's command to fight the battles of Tlaxcala and Mexico.

XILONA

[*Shrinkingly.*]

Indeed, I would fain obey you in this — but I find no love in my heart for the gallant Xicotencal.

ACHEL

Perhaps no room is left there for him since a stranger has forestalled him. Love is sometimes sweet but oft-times bitter. The maid who gives her love unsought is like to be no wife and may be less than maid. Does it become the Princess of Labna to fix her eyes upon her father's captive?

XILONA

[*Protestingly.*]

I protest, Achel; I have no fancy for the captive. His doctrines pleased me.

ACHEL

Oh, 'twas doctrine that pleased you! He taught the brotherhood of man and talked of love and other things, rare and wondrous. He would overturn our altars and banish our gods to make way for his own, while we, the priests of the ancient Maya cult, must stand down and bend beneath the authority of his omnipotent pope in a distant place called Rome. But while he preaches mercy, his countrymen practise murder; while he proclaims brotherhood, they ravage provinces. Neither the cruel oscelots in our forests nor the ravenous sharks in our waters are more fierce than these monsters. Doctrine, Princess! When the preacher is winsome, the doctrine is sure to be orthodox — for women. In all our Maya land, no eyes are blue like his. 'Twas in them you read the doctrine; but they burned with no lovelight for you. (*With great emphasis.*) He cursed you. He broke with sacrilegious yells into the most sacred, public rites of our religion and laid impious hands upon the sacrifice consecrated to our country's gods. He consigned your soul to eternal perdition and gave your body to be food for vultures. Strange wooing! Look you, Princess Xilona, this

man, come hither from we know not whence, was sheltered and honoured by your dead father, whose life he shortened; he has outraged the sacred rites of hospitality; moreover, being a priest of his religion, he is consecrated to his gods and may take no wife. He has no eyes for women. He scorned your proffered love. Now he marches with Malinche to Mexico. Crush them both, and be revenged for the outrage he has put upon you. Are you so little a woman or so poor a princess to be thus publicly flouted?

NEZEHUA

You, a Princess of Yucatan, to be scorned by such a man! A priest! indeed. His place is beneath your feet — put him there.

XILONA

[*Whose indignation has mounted.*]

It is sunset. Call the General Xicotencal. It is sunset!

[*Exeunt* NEZEHUA *and Attendants.*]

ACHEL

[*Aside.*]

Thus have I sown the seed that in due time shall yield the harvest I would reap.

[*Exit.*]

Scene II

The same.

Princess Xilona *and* General Xicotencal.

Enter Xicotencal *through the garden door.*

XICOTENCAL

The laggard sun has gone to rest; his dying rays light this vision on which my envious eyes now feast. His day is done, and my day begins. Xilona, my princess! My bride! Never till this hour did I fully know thy wondrous beauty. (*He kneels.*)

XILONA

Rise, Xicotencal. The sun has set, and I must keep my promise. It was my father's will that I should take you for my husband and my people also desire our union. I think you love me well?

XICOTENCAL

How shall I convince you? What other than love can I offer to you who possess all? I have a glorious pearl from Cubagua that is like a pallid rosebud touched by a silver moonbeam. It cost a man's life, for it was taken from the clenched hand of a diver who never rose from the caves of the sea where he ravished it from the jealous goddess who rules in the cerulean realm of the fishes. In your dark hair it will gleam like the moon of love. In the north country beyond the mountains, men find opals that flash

and burn with mysterious fires; they shall drape your body like garlands of stars. I will bring a mantle of humming-birds' feathers, imperial green, celestial blue, clasped with turquoise; and emeralds from far Peru, equal to Montezuma's crown jewels, shall blaze above your brow.

XILONA

These things do not tempt me, for love alone is the irresistible tempter, and he does not speak to me; I do not know his language.

XICOTENCAL

Your virgin heart is silent — and I would have it so. Let me, who love you as never man loved before, teach you his language. Let mine be the voice to first awaken the echoes of love in the chaste silences of your heart. Such love as you have kindled in my soul must beget a kindred flame in yours. We two are destined to be mated as royal eagles mate.

XILONA

Almost you persuade me — and yet — and yet —! What does love mean to men? Ardent always, but faithful never, so I am told.

XICOTENCAL

To me, love is life. Some men seek wisdom, but love is more precious than knowledge; some seek wealth, but love is above riches; others strive for

glory, but fame without love is barren. In my life I have seen men pursue follies; I have seen the good and the evil men do — I have seen and praised, or I have beheld and pitied, but until my love for you was born I knew only the love of my country; now these two are welded into one,— linked indissolubly and forever. It is from love alone I seek the great reward. Do you give it me and bid me live? Or do you deny it and bid me die?

XILONA

Nay, Xicotencal, I would not have you die. I am sore perplexed, for I am alone and weighted with grave cares and the burden of fateful decisions. You are strong and I need strength; you are wise and I need counsel. Ah! would you be kind to me?

XICOTENCAL

Kind as heaven's rain to mother earth; kind as summer's dew to thirsty flowers! Let me bear your burdens; lean on my strength, believe in my love and all will be well. Be my wife.

XILONA

I do believe you, but I will not bind myself — not now. There are also other things about which we must talk. You bring a message from the regents of your country asking the alliance of my state.

Achel tells me that this means our forces shall join with the Mexicans under Montezuma to fight the Spanish captain, Malinche.

XICOTENCAL

Such is my hope, but the pact with Montezuma is not yet made, though I would see it concluded. There are two parties in Tlaxcala, one favouring Montezuma; the other, animated by hatred, would make an alliance with Malinche, who is thought to be a god, in the hope of marching to Mexico and taking vengeance on Montezuma for his past cruelties to us. These men are deceived, for Malinche is no god, nor are his men immortal. I have seen them fall in battle. True it is, Montezuma has ever been the bitterest enemy of my country, but in the face of this common peril our past dissensions should be forgotten and we should all unite to destroy these foreign invaders. Give us your alliance and your voice will tip the scale. We will save Montezuma's crown and empire and earn his undying gratitude. We may claim a great reward.

XILONA

Montezuma was my father's friend, and I am not forgetful. There is amongst these Spaniards a certain man who dwelt here for six years as my father's captive, though greatly favoured and honoured by

him. He is, they tell me, a priest of his religion. His name is Geronimo.

XICOTENCAL

Geronimo! I know him well, for he is the tongue by which Malinche speaks, since he knows our language. He it is who most plays upon our people's superstitious fears and would persuade them that Malinche comes from the god Quetxalcoatl and that he is invincible; he tells them the Spaniards come to give them revenge for the tyrannies of Montezuma and to liberate the peoples of Mexico from the empire of fear. He preaches of a god whose name is love, but he lives by a god whose name is wrath.

XILONA

Ill did Geronimo requite my father's kindness. Xicotencal, this man insulted me. Before all the people, at the hour of sacrifice, he cursed me and blasphemed our gods.

XICOTENCAL

He shall die! I swear he shall die by my hand.

XILONA

Oh, I don't know! Perhaps not die — but he must be humbled. I would see him at my feet — a suppliant for mercy from the woman he scorned, from the princess he outraged! Shall my crown en-

dure his insults? Revenge — revenge! it is my right! I would have revenge!

XICOTENCAL

Your right is sacred, and revenge shall be yours. Give me the right to fight for you, and I will bring this insolent blasphemer, bound, to your feet. You shall dispose of him as you will, for he shall be your slave. Give me this right.

XILONA

Do this, and I will be your wife.

XICOTENCAL

[*Seeking to embrace her.*]

My bride! My queen!

XILONA

[*Repulsing him gently.*]

Not yet, Xicotencal. Bear first my answer to Tlaxcala, and conclude the pact with Montezuma. When Malinche is conquered and Geronimo is a slave at my feet, then will I redeem my promise. I will be yours.

XICOTENCAL

[*Exultantly.*]

I laugh at such small conditions! I fear not Malinche. Your desire shall be fulfilled, for love shall strengthen my arm and guide the flight of my javelins. Each blow I strike for Tlaxcala and Mexico

shall be struck for you and bring me a step nearer to you. See! (*Pointing to the rising moon.*) The pale queen of night hears and registers my vow! She rides silently through the silvered heavens, quenching the light of lesser stars as does the radiance of your beauty outshine the charms of the fairest women around your throne. Come with me tomorrow to Tlaxcala and there set your seal upon the pact you have made to-night. The regents await your answer: give it them with your own lips. To your beauty and to my strength belongs the world. A greater crown than that of Labna awaits you beyond the mountains. Come! Banish care and let us rejoice together. Let me lead you to Tlaxcala and to Mexico.

XILONA

[*Pensively, giving him her hand.*]
To Tlaxcala and to Mexico.
[*Exeunt.*]

Scene III

The next day.

Xicotencal, Achel, Xilona, Tlaxcalan Senator, Guerrero.

A terrace before the palace, approached by several stone steps. A long, low façade of stone extends across the stage; a centre doorway onto the ter-

race: some carved figures of gods: right and left, tropical foliage framing the scene.

XICOTENCAL

[*To* SENATOR.]

The tidings you bring me from Tlaxcala are both tardy and inopportune. Only yesterday I concluded a pact with the Princess of Labna, who promised her troops under Holcan's leadership to join our forces in opposing Malinche's advance. The Senate should have awaited my messenger.

SENATOR

The Senate was at first divided, leaning rather towards an alliance with Montezuma, but the party hostile to Mexico, led by the regent Maxixcatzin, won.

[*Enter* ACHEL.]

ACHEL

I have told the news to Princess Xilona. She comes hither.

XICOTENCAL

And my father — how did he vote?

SENATOR

For the alliance with Malinche. He does not trust the promises of Montezuma, nor can our people forget the Aztec's perfidy. The smooth speeches of his ambassador fell on unbelieving ears.

[*Enter* XILONA, *accompanied by* GUERRERO. *She is preceded by Attendants, who place a chair for her and withdraw.*]

XICOTENCAL

Princess Xilona, this member of my country's Senate brings important news from Tlaxcala.

XILONA

Achel has told me its import, but I would hear more of what passed in the Senate.

XICOTENCAL

[*To* SENATOR.]
Rehearse your story.

SENATOR

Five days ago, appeared before the assembled senators an embassy from Montezuma to solicit Tlaxcala's alliance against the Spaniards under the captain Malinche. The spokesman of the embassy promised perpetual amity and Montezuma's favour; he saluted Tlaxcalans as blood-brothers of his people and exhorted them to forget past dissensions, to stand with their Aztec kinsmen against the infidel invaders.

ACHEL

So should they do.

SENATOR

Almost he did persuade them, but when he withdrew to await the Senate's answer there came Malinche's envoy, a Christian priest, Geronimo, accompanied by an Aztec woman, who speaks many tongues.

XILONA

A woman! (*To* ACHEL.) Who is this woman?

ACHEL

The traitress Marina, a name henceforth infamous, for she is a harlot who has sold herself and her country to Malinche, under whose protection she parades her shame.

XILONA

[*To* SENATOR.]
Is this woman Marina beautiful?

SENATOR

[*Hands her a painted cloth with picture writing.*]
Here is her likeness and that of Malinche.

XILONA

I like not her face. Her nose is flat and — yes, by the gods, she has a squint.

ACHEL

[*Impatiently.*]

These things are unimportant. What spake Malinche's envoy?

SENATOR

He pronounced a well-considered speech, offering the senators their choice between peace or war with Malinche, between certain destruction and sure victory over our ancient, hereditary foe, Montezuma. His words were drunk by eager ears, for our people hunger to possess the Aztecs' lands and our warriors already savour the taste of their blood.

ACHEL

Fools! To be beguiled by fair words from the pale-faced strangers who only seek to gain a foothold in the country to enslave its peoples. Let the nations unite to sweep these vermin back into the eastern sea that cast them in an unlucky hour upon these coasts.

SENATOR

It is too late. Tlaxcala is pledged to the Spaniards. The day of vengeance upon Montezuma has dawned; wise men read portents in the heavens and throughout our land there echoes but one cry: to Mexico! to Mexico! The Senate's vote is cast.

[*Exit* SENATOR.]

XICOTENCAL

[*Smarting under the regent's rebuke.*]
By this vote of the Senate our plans are undone.

XILONA

Have I pledged my alliance to Tlaxcala to profit those I would rather destroy? Montezuma was ever my father's friend and Mexico our ally. My troops shall not fight against him.

ACHEL

We may yet turn their adverse decision to our purpose. Listen to me. The Princess of Labna will seem to hold to the conditions of her treaty and send her troops, under Holcan, to march with those of Tlaxcala to Mexico. (*To* XICOTENCAL.) You shall lead these united forces under the banner of the Republic. Timely notice to Montezuma's envoys will reassure him that our hearts are with him against the invaders and, once Malinche and his men are within the walls of Mexico, we shall declare ourselves with the Mexicans and overpower the strangers. Thus, taken amidst the canals of the great city, they will be powerless and our victory assured. Montezuma will be forever bound to us by ties of gratitude.

XICOTENCAL

This would be treachery! I am a soldier; I am

bound by my oath to the Senate, and I must lead the troops of Tlaxcala whither the regents command me.

ACHEL

Your scruples are over-nice. Your oath is sworn before the Senate, but your allegiance is due to your country. If the regents are blind to the consequences of their misguided decision, shall you follow their un-reason? Will you therefore fight under the standard of this accursed Malinche? Malinche! Malinche! He has deluged the land with innocent blood; the blaze of our burning villages crimsons the skies. Ye gods, who rule the destinies of nations, look down upon these ruins and let your lightnings strike the invaders! Hear the nation's groan and staunch the bleeding wounds of Mexico!

XICOTENCAL

The decision is not mine — it rests not with me to decide. I am a soldier.

ACHEL

[*Aside to Princess.*]
Speak to him.

XILONA

Xicotencal, this decision of the Senate is disastrous and wicked, and I will not accept it. If you obey the regent's orders and fight against Montezuma, you must fight against me, for I will not

march with Malinche. The advice of Achel is wise. Shall we renounce our purpose because the regent would betray his country to gratify his hatred of Montezuma? Let it rather be your part to save your people from the folly of this dotard.

XICOTENCAL

Do you, Xilona, counsel me to break my oath — my oath as a soldier? My obedience is pledged to the Senate.

XILONA

And your oath to me? — given at Labna with sighs and vows and protestations of eternal fidelity. Have you forgotten that, or does it no longer hold good? The senators are but puppets in the hand of the masterful regent, who bends them as he will and has carried their consent by violence. Do you love me, then, so little that you will violate your own conscience and better judgment at the regent's bidding, rather than keep faith with me — and claim my promise when victory is ours?

XICOTENCAL

You take me on my weakest side!

XILONA

And my revenge? You declared my right to vengeance was a sacred thing to which you would dedicate your life! I want my revenge. I will have

this man, Geronimo, brought, bound, to my feet — my slave. I want my revenge.

ACHEL

Listen, Xicotencal. Do men open their doors to thieves who will plunder their house and then turn them out of it? You say you are a soldier. Well and good: for what do you fight? Not for regents nor senates, but for your country. Save now your countrymen in the hour of their greatest need, when they are betrayed by the Senate, and the regents would open the door to these foreign robbers. You will be the saviour of Tlaxcala and of Mexico. Great will be the name of Xicotencal forever throughout Anáhuac.

XICOTENCAL

[*Muttering to himself.*]

This touches my honour — but there is glory, there is love. Where lies my duty?

XILONA

[*To* GUERRERO.]

My troops shall not march with Malinche.

GUERRERO

The Spaniards can do nothing without allies, for they are few and ignorant of the country. I have drilled the soldiers of Labna well in the Castilian art of war, and I will lead them against Malinche.

Moreover, I have learned that all his men are not of one mind. Many of them grumble and are ready to rebel; they want to go back to their ships, for they fear Montezuma and have no stomach for this march to Mexico. We can easily detach these men with the promise of a safe escort to their ships, and thus reduce his numbers.

ACHEL

This fits well with our designs. We must approach these malcontents and divide Malinche's forces. Weaken him first and then strike.

XICOTENCAL

[*To* GUERRERO.]

Are the Spaniards not your countrymen?

GUERRERO

I have no country save Yucatan. The Princess of Labna is my sovereign for whom I will fight and die. I know no other.

XILONA

My faithful Holcan! I thank you. (*To* XICOTENCAL.) His devotion springs from the heart, and hence he does not forsake me. Is your love but a shallow passion that spends itself in lip-phrases? Do you desert me?

XICOTENCAL

[*Desperately.*]

No! So let it be. For I too hate these Spanish

thieves with all my heart. Since the senators betray the Republic, now let the soldiers come to its defence. Xilona, our pact is sacred and I will keep my pledge to you, come what may. You shall have your vengeance.

XILONA

And you shall have my hand and share my throne.

XICOTENCAL

It is your heart I want.

ACHEL

I will treat this matter with the Mexican ambassador, so that Montezuma, being made acquainted with our fidelity to him, may devise opportune means to accomplish our holy purpose. The gods of Mexico be with us! To the sun of Anáhuac we will offer the heart of Malinche.

[*Exeunt.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

Scene I

Time: November, 1519.

Xilona, Geronimo, Achel, Xicotencal, Guerrero, Nezehua, Cortes, Marina, Montezuma, Kings of Texcoco *and* Tacuba, *Spanish Troops, Tlaxcalan Soldiers, Spanish Monks, Aztec Courtiers and Soldiers, Corps de Ballet, Musicians and Populace of Mexico.*

The scene shows the first meeting between Montezuma *and* Cortes. *In the background rises the snowy cone of Popocatapetl crowned with smoke; the blue waters of the lake stretch across the scene; and on its farther shore are seen the pyramids, towers and roofs of Mexico. The stage represents an open square on which, to the right foreground, stands the portico of a fortified building, half palace, half fortress. This portico is approached by broad steps and is hung with tapestries and garlands.* Montezuma's *throne occupies its centre, with a seat opposite for* Cortes *and others to the right, and left for the two Kings and* Princess Xilona.

The curtain rises on an animated scene. Policemen are clearing the way and putting the crowd in order. Amidst the hubbub, a blare of trumpets is heard, followed by a roll of small drums and Spanish martial music. The Spanish troops, led in by their captains, and composed of gentlemen adventurers, soldiers, sailors, negroes dragging culverins, and Indian allies, enter and take places on the left front, opposite the royal portico. XICOTENCAL *leads the united forces of Tlaxcala and Labna, distinguished from one another by their respective colours.* GUERRERO *heads the Labna troops.*

XICOTENCAL

[*To* GUERRERO.]

You have well considered my instructions and know what you have to do?

GUERRERO

I understand.

XICOTENCAL

The priest, Geronimo, will come with Malinche and will stand here with us. When the entertainment offered by the Emperor to the strangers is finished, Montezuma will lead Malinche through the palace, while the troops will march by yon causeway into the city. It is Princess Xilona's will that Geronimo should be detained here by us. While you detach

him from his companions and hold him engaged in conversation apart until all the troops have left, I will so place my men as to conceal you from the Spaniards and cut him off from joining them. See! the barge of the Princess Xilona approaches.

[*A state barge touches the landing-place at the back, from which* XILONA, ACHEL, NEZEHUA *and Attendants land, amidst the acclamations of the crowd. They advance towards the royal portico,* ACHEL *leading* XILONA.]

XICOTENCAL

[*Approaching* XILONA.]

Princess, I salute you. Without your presence, Montezuma's festival had lacked its queen.

XILONA

'Tis not the festival that brings me. I would see this captain Malinche who has sown such turmoil throughout the empire. He is acclaimed as a god.

ACHEL

Foolish superstition! He is no god, nor yet a child of the sun. At last Montezuma has given ear to the counsels of wisdom. Malinche comes to the festival of death. Once within the city, he is delivered into our hands.

XICOTENCAL

[*To* XILONA.]

Do you enter Mexico?

XILONA

No, we return as we came, across the lake, where I shall await news in the fortress of Chalco.

XICOTENCAL

Your wait will be brief.

XILONA

[*Eagerly.*]
Have you a plan?

XICOTENCAL

A perfect plan. The priest Geronimo will be seized here to-day. When the Emperor withdraws with Malinche into the palace and the troops march into the city, Holcan will deliver him to me.

XILONA

Is there not danger?

XICOTENCAL

Is there danger I would not dare for you? Do you think I forget my reward? This night Geronimo shall be at your mercy.

[*Here the second group of Spaniards enters: several gentlemen, preceded by halberdiers; then a group of friars, carrying the standard of* CORTES, *a reliquary of Santiago, a statue of the Blessed Virgin under a canopy; finally,* CORTES, *in full armour, mounted on a*

horse which is led by GERONIMO *and* MARINA. *They take their places facing the portico. The booming of the great snake-skin drum in the distant temple is heard, followed by Indian salutes on trumpets, A procession composed of Aztec Nobles enters, at the end of which appear three chamberlains bearing golden wands, which they elevate to signify the Emperor's approach: the people bow their faces to the earth.* MONTEZUMA *is carried in a golden litter, gorgeously fringed and plumed, by the sides of which walk the two Kings. The litter halts midway up the centre and the Emperor descends. He takes a golden wand in his hand and, supported by the two Kings and followed by his Chamberlains and Train-Bearers, he advances. He wears a golden cuirass, golden buskins and sandals, laced with scarlet and jewelled with emeralds: from his shoulders falls a voluminous mantle of shot green, gold and blue, imitating as nearly as possible the brilliant colours of the robe of humming-birds' feathers: his mitre-shaped crown blazes with emeralds and is decorated with a cascade of brilliant green feathers.*

As soon as the imperial litter appears, CORTES *dismounts and approaches the Emperor, doff-*

ing his hat; he makes a gesture as though to embrace MONTEZUMA, *at which a movement of horror goes through the crowd and the two Kings quickly intervene and prevent the proffered familiarity. The Emperor stands like a statue, immovable.* CORTES *takes from his neck a collar of diamonds and pearls, which he offers to* MONTEZUMA, *who in turn signs to an Attendant to approach and takes from him a golden collar with pendants. He places it on* CORTES' *neck.*

The Emperor takes his seat on the throne, the Kings and the PRINCESS *doing likewise on theirs, while* CORTES *is placed on the seat opposite, with* MARINA *beside him.* GERONIMO *is with the group opposite the portico.*

Here follows the ballet, in two parts. First, the dance of Vestals, in which there is a pas seul for a premiere danseuse. Second, a comical acrobatic dance of dwarfs and human freaks. The Emperor retires as he came, except that he goes first, accompanied by CORTES, *and does not mount his litter.*

While MONTEZUMA, CORTES *and the Court are leaving the portico, and the Spanish Soldiers and others are following them,* GUERRERO *approaches* FRA GERONIMO *and engages him in conversation in dumb show.*

GERONIMO *at first repulses him, but* GUERRERO *is insistent, demonstrative, showing repentance, etc.; he kneels before the friar, kisses the cross hanging from his girdle, and thus wins* GERONIMO *to respond affectionately to his advances. Meanwhile, the Tlaxcalan Soldiers have crowded in between* GERONIMO *and the departing Spaniards, thus cutting him off from them. At a given moment,* GERONIMO *is seized, overpowered and bound, while* GUERRERO *laughs at him.* XILONA *and* ACHEL *witness this capture from a distance as they are descending the steps and approaching the barge, into which they enter. The action is covered throughout by music, ending in a triumphant finale.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Evening of the same day.

XILONA — GERONIMO — XICONTENCAL — ACHEL — *Two Indians. A low, flat-ceiled room in an Aztec fortress near Mexico. The ceiling is supported by two square stone columns that divide the room: against each of these columns stands an idol on a pedestal. A window, at the back, divided by columns into three openings, shows a*

view of the volcano. Entrances at right centre and left front.

XILONA

To-day I saw that strange warrior whose presence keeps all Mexico in a ferment . . . Malinche. . . . Whence comes he and on what direful errand bent? He out-matched the Emperor in majesty, and I saw in Montezuma's quailing eye the unaccustomed spectre of nameless fear. Is he the fore-ordained? . . . the avenger of a god betrayed, who holds within his deciding hand the destinies of Mexico . . . and mine? If we are doomed to fall, and kings to wear the manacles of servitude, then let me choose my master . . . Geronimo . . . Geronimo. . . . How my lips linger on that name! Yet hope beats but feebly in my heart. (*She goes to the window and looks out impatiently.*) No sign of Xicotencal! How slowly turn the wheels of time! I age with waiting.

[*Cries are heard without, and she again looks from the window.*]

At last, 'tis Xicotencal! Do the gods bring me to-night my desire?

[*Enter* XICOTENCAL *and* GERONIMO, *who is bound and led by two Tlaxcalan Soldiers.*]

XICOTENCAL

Princess, you are mistress of this fortress which

you hold for the Emperor. Into your keeping I deliver this prisoner.

XILONA

Leave the prisoner with me, General, for I would speak with him. Loose his bonds. I will call you anon.

[GERONIMO *is unbound.* XICOTENCAL *salutes and withdraws, followed by Soldiers.*]

[*A moment of doubtful silence, during which* GERONIMO *does not look at* XILONA.]

XILONA

Have you naught to say to me, Geronimo?

GERONIMO

I have not sought speech with you.

XILONA

You were my father's prisoner. You are now mine.

GERONIMO

I am the Emperor's guest. We are not in Yucatan.

XILONA

I promised you freedom then, and I can give it to you now. Have you forgotten Labna that was your home?

GERONIMO

I have forgotten nothing — neither my captivity nor your shame.

XILONA

Your speech is harsh. In what have I offended you?

GERONIMO

I have seen you taste human flesh and blood. You — you who, of all the lost souls of this new world — groping in the night of ignorance, were chosen to receive the message of salvation. You have shut your eyes to the celestial light you should have followed; you have rejected the message whispered across sterile ages by some mysterious apostle of God, and you shall perish — rejected. Damnation is the fate of all who sin against the light.

XILONA

How shall I follow the light with none to lead me? I see but dimly. You came to me as the messenger of the god of love . . . you were to teach me love.

GERONIMO

You are a heathen woman and I pity you. Talk not of love to a Christian priest, else must I also despise you.

XILONA

Do you, the priest of the god of love, defame love?

Is not love above everything, sacred . . . nature's truest instinct? Shame has no part in love.

GERONIMO

Your understanding is clouded because you know only the love of the flesh, which is lust. But why do I speak? Shall I cast pearls before swine?

XILONA

Geronimo, I am alone . . . alone. Love has entered as a thief into my heart. I had dreamed, as maidens must, of love — of him who was to complete my life, to be my other, my better self: love was to be beautiful, peaceful; it was to bring joy and happiness. Alas! where is my poor dream? For love is strife — it is torment — it is death.

GERONIMO

Such is carnal love. You have tasted the bitterness of disordered human passion; its flatteries are poison, its promises are false. Sorrow is the fruit of desire, for pure love knows not full fruition in this life. Rise out of these depths. Repent, chastise the flesh, and give your love to my Master.

XILONA

Your master? . . . But I know him not. You are my master. You love your master, and I love mine. (*She approaches him.*)

GERONIMO

Stand away from me, daughter of Satan! My hands are anointed.

XILONA

[*Pleadingly.*]

You promised me your counsel; we were to teach my people the true religion. Come now with me to Yucatan, where we will work together and make them all Christians. My people will welcome us, and they will accept your teaching. Let us fly this cursed land of blood and tears, overshadowed by on-coming doom. Come with me to Labna . . . beautiful Labna . . . far from here, far from war and death. I will lead you thither, not as captive but as king, for you shall rule my people. See. (*She casts aside her outer draperies.*) Men have called me fair: great warriors and mighty chieftains have wooed me. All the delights that woman can give to man, I will give to you. Geronimo, since first my glance rested on your face, my eyes can see no other. . . . I am yours — take me, I am yours forever.

GERONIMO

You are the image of woman by whom sin first came into the world. You are the eternal temptress — the seducer of souls. Your body, fed with man's flesh, fills me with loathing: — your body, desired of kings, is not fair to me, for it is a tainted thing,

full like a whited sepulchre of foulness and corruption: your body, that you perfume and deck with jewels and offer to men, is but a lure of Satan with which he baits his trap to catch unwary souls. Speak no more to me. I am armoured against carnal temptations by my holy vows — for I am a priest of the most high God; a priest forever, for whom it is profanation and eternal death to look on woman like you.

[XILONA *strikes a gong, enter* XICOTENCAL, *followed by* ACHEL *and two Soldiers.*]

XILONA

[*With suppressed fury.*]

Xicotencal, kill this man. Kill him here and now!

[XICOTENCAL *draws a knife and rushes with tiger-like ferocity towards* GERONIMO, *who stands immovable, awaiting the blow.* XILONA *draws her veil over her face and rushes from the room. Just as* XICOTENCAL *is about to strike,* ACHEL *intervenes.*]

ACHEL

Not here, nor by your hand shall this man die. We are in Mexico — not Yucatan. Bind the captive.

[*The Indians bind* GERONIMO *and lead him to one side.*]

[*To* XICOTENCAL.]

This priest's absence is already noticed and is causing great commotion. To kill him here by Princess Xilona's orders is to risk the undoing of all our plans. One has just come to me from Mexico who reports that search is being made everywhere for him and Montezuma has published the death penalty for whosoever shall harm this man, Geronimo.

XICOTENCAL

What shall be done with him? Give him up we dare not, for he would betray us.

ACHEL

Let him be confined in the cavern under this fortress: there he will lie as buried in a grave of living rock until Malinche is in our power, when we will sacrifice them together. You will return to Mexico tonight: Holcan has won over sixty of Malinche's men, who are ready to desert him and return to their ships; when the bridges are raised, do you organise a tumult in the city, in the midst of which Tlaxcalans and Mexicans will fall upon the Spanish quarters and capture Malinche. Strike quickly, and strike hard.

XICOTENCAL

Aye. We must act speedily. To-morrow, we will raise the bridges and cut off the Spaniards' return. Now to the cavern with the prisoner.

ACHEL

And these two soldiers who share the secret of his whereabouts — are they to be trusted?

XICOTENCAL

I trust no man. I shall kill the soldiers.

[ACHEL *moves a secret spring, and one of the idols against the pillar slowly revolves, disclosing a narrow stairway leading down into the dungeon. The Soldiers lead* GERONIMO *forward and, followed by* XICOTENCAL, *they descend the stairs.* ACHEL *remains, listening at the opening.*]

SCENE III

The next day.

In CORTES' *quarters, in Mexico.*

N. B. The language is assumed to change to Spanish in this act. MARINA *speaks brokenly and with an accent.*

CORTES — *Captains* — *Priests* — *Spanish Soldiers* — *A few Tlaxcalans* — MARINA — VILLAFAÑA.

A large, bare room, with dirty, white-washed walls, on which hangs a black crucifix with a small oil lamp burning before it. A long, heavy table to the left front, with one arm-chair and several stools or small benches form the furniture. Entrance in the centre by an open doorway, outside which a Spanish sentry passes and repasses. On the

right, at the extreme back, the room has a bay, used as a chapel, in which stands an invisible altar, the light from which streams into the room. All the Soldiers are kneeling and crowding about the opening of this improvised chapel. A religious service has just finished. One Monk stands as cross-bearer, a Friar, vested in a cope, is passing amongst the soldiers, carrying a reliquary, which he gives each man to kiss. Another Monk carries the incense. A murmur of prayers is heard, and the Priests pass out. The Soldiers get up, collect their arms, and go off about their business.

CORTES *and his Captains all gather about the table, where a bundle of letters and papers is being opened and distributed.*

VILLAFAÑA, *hovering restlessly about, starts towards the door.*

MARINA

[*She steps before* VILLAFAÑA, *waving him back with a dramatic gesture, crying aloud, in tone of alarm.*]

Close the doors! This man (*pointing to* VILLAFAÑA) is a traitor! He has betrayed you all. Now he would give the signal for his assassins to kill you!

[VILLAFAÑA *is seized and roughly held. He tries to swallow a piece of paper, but it is choked from his mouth and given to* CORTES, *who reads it to himself.*]

CORTES

These names! These names! (*To* MARINA.) What does all this mean?

MARINA

A woman of Tlaxcala crept to-day to my door. She was wounded, covered with blood. Just now, ere she died, she told me that the Indian captain, Holcan, stabbed her when he found her listening to him planning with General Xicotencal to kill you. At this hour, while you are here unarmed, at this man's signal, other Spaniards waiting outside and the Indians from Labna and Tlaxcala were to take you by surprise. All the bridges were to be raised to-night and your men taken in a trap. Xicotencal and Holcan are the secret allies of the Mexicans, and when you were killed they would have joined them, and thus all the Spaniards would be captured and sacrificed to their gods. When the Indian woman escaped them and took refuge in my house, they were afraid, fearing she would tell me; so Holcan and Xicotencal fled early this morning. The woman did not speak till just now — and then she died.

CORTES

[*To* VILLAFAÑA.]

Is this the truth? (VILLAFAÑA *is silent.*) You won't speak?

ALVARADO

Give him the question.

SPANIARDS

The question! The question!

[CORTES *nods assent.*]

ALVARADO

Bring the screws.

[*Thumbscrews are brought and put on* VILLAFAÑA.]

Give them a twist.

[VILLAFAÑA *groans and writhes.*]

CORTES

Is this woman's story true?

VILLAFAÑA

It is. I am abandoned.

CORTES

Well, let us hear the rest. How did this begin?

VILLAFAÑA

Xicotencal has always hated us Spaniards, and has from the beginning had a secret understanding with the Mexicans. It was agreed that his forces and those of Yucatan would go over to the Mexicans, in spite of the orders of the regents of Tlaxcala.

CORTES

And who conceived this pretty plot?

VILLAFAÑA

Achel.

CORTES

I don't know him. Who is he?

VILLAFAÑA

The high priest of Yucatan.

CORTES

The high priest! Well, it smells of the sacristy. If they had him in Rome, they would make him a cardinal. (*Jokingly.*) Eh, friar? And what was your purpose — and that of these others? (*Pointing to the paper.*)

VILLAFAÑA

General, this invasion is madness, and we are weary of it. We want to go back to Cuba. What chance has our handful of men against the countless hordes of Mexico? The Mexicans have brought us into their city the more easily to annihilate us. We are taken here like rats in a trap, and our only chance is to get back to our ships while we still may. We have begged you to lead us back, but you would not listen. So — well — we arranged with Xicotencal and Holcan to leave to-night. They promised us an open road and safe passage to the sea. Since you

would not come, we saw no reason why we should be slaughtered also like cattle in the shambles. But for you, most of the men would follow us, for nobody's heart is in this conquest. We want to go back to Cuba.

CORTES

Ah! You did not want to be slaughtered — you and your friends — so you planned to slaughter me and my officers instead! Retreat, and give up the conquest. Lives there a man so — so — What are you? Spaniards?

SPANIARDS

[*Shouting.*]

No! No! Cowards! Traitors! Outlaws!

CORTES

Spain rejects you. Catholics?

SPANIARDS

[*Shouting angrily.*]

No! Apostates! Heretics! Judas!

CORTES

The Church's ban is upon you, who, to save your worthless lives, connived with heathen and cannibals against us who are fighting battles for the extension of the realms of our invincible sovereign, Don Carlos, our Lord (*All uncover*) and for the exaltation of

the Cross of Christ. (*All cross themselves.*) You are worse than unregenerate Jew or relapsed heretic, and you insult the honour of these hidalgos, saying that they share your cowardice and would follow you. But you reckoned badly, for this is not man's war. 'Tis not I who lead these troops, 'tis Santiago, the protector of Spanish soldiers. To Santiago the victory, to God the glory!

SPANIARDS

[*With wild enthusiasm.*]
Viva Santiago! Viva España!

CORTES

[*Sneeringly.*]
So you would return to Cuba? Well, I'll send you to a hotter place than Cuba. Let him be hanged before his own door. There let his body swing, as a warning to his fellow traitors.

[VILLAFAÑA *is bound, and led away.*]

CORTES

The fugitives have doubtless made for Tlaxcala, and they have a good eight hours' start. I shall leave the task of judging Xicotencal to his own people. Alvarado, organise a party to ride in haste to Tlaxcala and report their General's treason.

[ALVARADO *gives orders, and some men go out.*]
As for the other, Holcan, commanding the forces of Labna —

MARINA

[*Interrupting him.*]

That man is no Indian. He is a Spaniard.

ALL

[*Exclaiming.*]

A Spaniard! How then?

MARINA

He was a captive during six years in Yucatan. His Spanish name was Guerrero, and he organised and drilled the troops of Labna, married the ruler's niece, and has two boys. The Tlaxcalan woman told me this, and that it is he who yesterday carried off Fra Geronimo to some secret place, but she knew not where.

[*Surprise is seen on every face as the men crowd around, questioning and exclaiming.*]

CORTES

A renegade Spaniard! Alvarado, you will know how to deal with him. The garrote is too good for him. The stake for such as he.

[*All assent, with curses and mutterings.*]

CORTES

[*To* ALVARADO.]

And now, be off in haste and run down these dogs. Ride in two parties; take guides and interpreters. We must find and save Fra Geronimo if he still lives.

Xicotencal may be left to the Tlaxcalans, and do you burn the traitor Spaniard.

ALL

[*Shouting.*]

Burn the Spaniard! Burn the Spaniard!

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

Scene I

The next evening.

Same as Scene 2, ACT III. Room in the Aztec fortress of Chalco. A fire burns on an open hearth, with some metal and pottery vessels standing about it.

Xilona — Nezehua — Achel.

XILONA

[*To* Nezehua.]

Here in this gloomy fortress we keep our mournful watch, far from the pleasant air and glorious sunshine of Labna. And my golden coyol-bird — the little golden-throated herald of God, who daily sang in my fragrant garden to publish the birth of odorous blossoms? Who now hears his magic notes? Who now heeds his tuneful message? Perhaps the coyol-bird is dead — dead amidst the flowers in my dear, my distant garden. Ah me! I think that golden-throated bird is dead. Listen, aunt, to the prophecy of the god Quetzalcoatl. (*Reads from the book*) . . . "and Quetzalcoatl prophesying said . . ."

NEZEHUA

[*Interrupting impatiently.*]

No! No! I will not listen to these dismal sayings. Desist from tormenting yourself over these gloomy mysteries. Who knows what such prophecies mean?

XILONA

But there is no mystery here. These words are plain. But we are all blind! Are not we misled by our priests, who sink us ever deeper in the slough of disobedience, while they pretend to satisfy the divine anger by bloody sacrifices?

NEZEHUA

Don't ask me. You, my child, are young and fair, and nothing is so unbecoming in a pretty woman as positive theological opinions. Now is the season of love, and I would see you occupied with your lover Xicotencal, rather than puzzling your pretty head over ancient prophecies. See! I am embroidering this veil with pearls and turquoises for you. It is for your marriage day.

XILONA

[*Sadly.*]

I shall never be married. Unhappy Xicotencal, and unhappy the day when first he fixed his heart on me! For, look you, aunt, I love him not and never shall. Against his will and only to win me, he has

perjured himself, and the end of this for him is death. He has slain an innocent man whose blood is on my soul. The treachery Achel planned against the Spaniards will fail, for Malinche is irresistible and he is terrible. What spake the god Quetzalcoatl? . . . "My followers, like unto me, shall destroy this perverse nation, and overthrow its altars." Malinche does this, for he has levelled our high places and cast down our gods — our false gods — into the dust. All who oppose Malinche die, and they shall die, for he is our conqueror, come to chastise our people for their apostasy. Xicotencal is a murderer and shall pay with his life for his obedience to my wicked commands. And I, weighted with guilt and remorse, live always under the shadow of those dreadful wings — the vultures' wings that seem to beat about my head. The wings, the black wings like death shadows suffocate me! It was Geronimo's prophecy.

NEZEHUA

[*Seeking to comfort her.*]

No, my sweet, you must not have dark thoughts. You are overwrought with our long waiting in this gloomy place. Why, the last news from Mexico was good; Holcan's messenger announced that they had even won some of Malinche's own men to their side, and that their plans were perfect; they only wait the propitious moment to strike.

XILONA

That moment will never, never come. I must tell Xicotencal the truth,— that I can never marry him — and beg him to give up the plot and remain true to his oath. I hear the beating of wings — of black vultures' wings! This haunting terror takes shape and my cheek is chilled by an icy wind heralding the approach of death's messenger. The hour of reckoning draws nigh and my guilty soul must meet the punishment of my crime.

[*Enter* ACHEL.]

ACHEL

No messenger to-day from the Spanish camp. The news of our success is over-due.

XILONA

It will never come.

ACHEL

'Tis ill tidings that travel most quickly; since we hear nothing, all is well. Even his own men rebel against the insolence of Malinche. The sacrificial knife (*he draws it from beneath his robe*) is whetted, and my arm is strengthened for the blow that shall open his breast and give his heart to the Sun and his blood to our god of war.

XILONA

Let us have done with murder! Think you thus to

please the supreme creator by acts of inhuman butchery? (*She produces the book.*) Give heed, Achel, to the teaching of the divine Quetzalcoatl. (*She reads.*) "Let no human sacrifice pollute the altar of our God. Know ye that not by sacrifices of human blood can divine decrees be changed or God's just wrath appeased, for these are vain inventions which dishonour God and defile man."

ACHEL

[*Wrathfully seizing the book.*]

Whence have you this book? Thus have the unlearned ever wrested the sense of inspired writings to their own undoing! Know, child, that there are mysteries in our faith too deep for common understanding. Malinche is sent as the scourge of the gods. He blindly fulfils decrees beyond his comprehension, and his present victory over our people is but the divine chastisement of their lukewarmness. This holy purpose served, the accursed instruments shall be delivered into our hands; they shall purge and pass as does a pestilence or the fury of the devastating hurricane. Mexico triumphant shall be re-consecrated and the favour of the gods shall shine anew upon a fervent and repentant people.

XILONA

Malinche comes as the foreordained avenger. Our priests have turned our temples into charnel-houses

and exalted murder into a ritual. To you who have been the minister of death, Malinche comes as death's messenger to summon you to judgment. To the helpless, suffering peoples of this land, whose life-blood you drain, he comes as a saviour.

[*Voices are heard without,* NEZEHUA *opens the door and admits* XICOTENCAL. *She goes out.*]

SCENE II

The same.

XICOTENCAL

We have failed! Our plans were overheard last night by a woman of Tlaxcala, who betrayed everything to Marina. Holcan and I barely escaped from Mexico before Malinche was informed; but the Spaniards are now hot upon our tracks. Come Xilona, this place can no longer shelter us.

[XILONA *looks bewildered.*]

ACHEL

[*Bitterly.*]

Betrayed! and by a woman! It is always a woman! I must see Holcan.

[*Exit* ACHEL.]

XICOTENCAL

Xilona, we must away. I have been false to my oath, I have betrayed my trust and neither amongst Spaniards nor in my native Tlaxcala is there any

place for me. I have bartered my honour for your love, but oh! my treasure, my moon of love, I hold the bargain cheap! I would sell worlds for your smile . . . for the touch of your hand. You are sweeter to me than life — more sacred than the breath I draw.

[*He seeks to embrace her.*]

XILONA

[*Shrinking.*]

Oh, Xicotencal, 'tis I who have ruined your life! 'Tis I who have brought you to dishonour! But I will save you, I will conceal you.

XICOTENCAL

Conceal me! We will fly together — whither you please. To Yucatan, to Labna, or to some far country where love and life shall be ours till death. My reputation, my triumphs, my honour — let them all go! What are they but vain, fleeting things dressed out in a semblance of reality for our delight, and loaned to us by the gods? Fortune is inconstant and forsakes her favourites in the hour of greatest need; but love is above everything and is forever . . . and I have love, Xilona, for I have you. (*Always seeking to embrace her.*)

XILONA

[*Troubled and gently repulsing him.*]

No, Xicotencal, I am unworthy of you, for I am a

poor, weak girl, torn by doubts, pulled hither and thither by forces I can neither guide nor resist. When first you wooed me in Labna, I did not know my heart and I did not love you as you would have me love you. I only craved revenge . . . revenge for the insults the priest Geronimo had made me suffer. My one desire was to see him at my mercy. To win that, I promised you. . . .

XICOTENCAL

[*Interrupting impetuously.*]

I have kept my pledge. I brought him to your feet. . . . I would have obeyed you to the end, save for Achel. I would have killed him as you commanded.

XILONA

[*With emotion.*]

Ah! you would have killed him! . . . then . . . he is not dead?

XICOTENCAL

Nay, my mistress. Chide me not. You shall be obeyed, for I will kill him now.

XILONA

[*Hysterically.*]

He is not dead! He is not dead!

XICOTENCAL

[*Mistaking her emotion for anger.*]

I could not kill him, because Achel prevented me;

but he is dying not one death but a hundred . . . he is dying by inches. Your revenge is not lost. . . .

XILONA

[*Interrupting eagerly.*]
Dying, you say? But where?

XICOTENCAL

He is in the rock cavern beneath this fortress — a secret grotto reached by a concealed stairway behind that image. Achel would have it so, fearing to kill him before we had secured Malinche and his men, lest Montezuma's wrath should fall on you.

XILONA

[*Breathlessly.*]
Yes, yes! Well, go on!

XICOTENCAL

But death's hand is closing upon him, for I bound him fast to a rock; there amidst subterranean darkness, where no light pierces, with the foul slimy creatures that haunt caverns and feed on dead things to keep him company, he is fast bound and can move neither hand nor foot; without food, without water. Ah! water! But water is there. A sweet spring gushes from the rock and runs in a cool rivulet that just bathes his feet — a rivulet his lips can never touch.

[XILONA *has listened with suppressed rage and*

excitement, but now loses self-control. She turns furiously upon him.]

XILONA

Monster! Fiend! You have dared to thus torture this man . . . this man whom I love! . . . Yes, whom I love! — for every hair of his head is dearer to me than my crown. You sought my love, but you are blind — blinder even than I myself have been, for only he fills my heart,— my life. May the gods curse you in the light of the morning and in the silence of the night! May they curse you in this world and in the next! And while we eat, he starves! while we drink, his lips are parched! I hate you, I loathe you! For every torment you have inflicted upon him, you shall suffer a score; for every pang that has racked his body, a hundred shall tear yours! I will kill you! I will torture you with my own hands. You shall die — not one death but fifty!

[*A distant trumpet blast is heard.*]

Ah! the Spaniards! They come in good time. I will deliver you to Malinche for he has torments that wring tears of blood from his victims.

[*She rushes to the window. Voices and noises are heard outside. She calls out.*]

Lower the bridge; open the gates and admit the Spaniards! The traitor is here . . . here in this room.

[*Enter* ACHEL *and* GUERRERO *in haste.*]

ACHEL

[*Rushing towards the idol that conceals the stairway.*]

Quick, Xicotencal! There is not an instant to lose! The Spaniards are here! There is a secret passage leading from the cavern below through the bowels of the mountain to an opening in a remote gorge; there you may take a canoe on the river and reach the sea, whence you may cross to Yucatan. Away at once, and wait for us in Labna.

XICOTENCAL

No! Shall I run like vermin and be dragged from a hole or done to death in some corner? Let me at least face death, for death is justice, it is expiation: death is my deliverer, and through death, with its accompanying shame in the eyes of men, I regain my birthright of honour in the sight of God.

ACHEL

But why die? We shall all be safe in Labna, forgotten by Malinche.

XICOTENCAL

Malinche never forgets. Shall I weep to leave this world, where I have lived in a vain illusion? I have already overstayed my time.

[*Exit* ACHEL. *Enter the blind* REGENT, XICOTENCAL, *led by a Page.*]

REGENT

I seek the General Xicotencal of Tlaxcala. Is he present?

XICOTENCAL

My father! I am here.

REGENT

It is not your father who seeks you. It is your judge.

XICOTENCAL

I am here.

REGENT

General Xicotencal, the messengers of Malinche, whom I met on the road, have gone to publish the news of your treason throughout Tlaxcala. What punishment do the laws of our Republic prescribe for treason?

XICOTENCAL

The punishment for treason is death.

REGENT

You have said it. You have violated your oath to the Senate, you are guilty of treachery; your name is infamous throughout Anáhuac. I pronounce upon you the sentence of death.

XICOTENCAL

And death — is it worse than life? All the world is a grave, and naught escapes it.

[*Enter* ALVARADO *and* SPANIARDS.]

ALVARADO

We have traced the fugitives to this fortress.

REGENT

They are here. Behold them.

SPANIARDS

[*Shouting threats and surrounding* GUERRERO *with menaces.*]

Which is the Spaniard? Kill the Spaniard! Curses on the renegade! Burn the heretic! . . . etc.

ALVARADO

[*Defending* GUERRERO *and pushing off the* SPANIARDS.]

His punishment is not here. Stand off. Are we savages? Let his sentence be executed in good order. This is unseemly.

REGENT

[*To* ALVARADO.]

In accordance with the laws of Tlaxcala, and by my power as regent of the republic, I have sentenced General Xicotencal to death. I now authorise you to carry out this sentence.

ALVARADO

[*Amazed.*]

But . . . is this man not your son?

REGENT

[*Stoically.*]
No traitor is son of mine.

ALVARADO

My orders were to let him be judged and executed by his own people.

REGENT

He has been judged by his own people: spare them the shame of a public execution in Tlaxcala. Let him be strangled.

[ALVARADO *assents, and both prisoners are bound.*]

XICOTENCAL

[*To* XILONA.]
I have been your fool, and I pay with my life for my folly. You, Xilona, are in your turn but a toy . . . a plaything in the hands of fate; for great forces are now loosed in Mexico, forces that shall rend and crush you. We are dishonoured — you and I — and we both perish, overwhelmed in the sea of infamy, that engulfs us. I thank the gods that I shall not witness the downfall of my people — that I die dishonoured, therein lies all my grief. May the gods forgive me and may men forget me!

[*Exeunt* XICOTENCAL, ALVARADO, GUERRERO, REGENT *and the* SPANIARDS.]

[XILONA *watches a moment from the window,*

then, lighting a torch and taking a pottery vessel from the fire, she pushes the idol aside and enters the stairway leading to the cavern. ACHEL *enters in time to see her: he creeps stealthily to the opening, listens a moment and then, with a gesture of rage, follows* XILONA.]

SCENE III

An underground cavern with fantastic stalactites. In the far background is seen a faint, bluish haze, suggesting distant daylight; otherwise the cavern is dark.

GERONIMO *is standing, bound to a pillar-like rock; a spring of water flows from the wall and runs into a small pool at his feet; steep stairs cut in the rock lead upwards.* GERONIMO *is in a state of extreme exhaustion, being without food or drink for two days and nights; his eyes are bent on the pool and he strains at his bonds to reach the water.*

GERONIMO

[*In a weak, gasping voice.*]

Water . . . water. . . . By Thy great thirst on Calvary, O divine Master, send me surcease from this torment . . . send merciful death to end this slow torture! Water . . . water! (*His head droops and he faints.*)

[*Bats and owls are dimly seen flitting through the gloom.*]

[XILONA *descends the steps, carrying the torch and bowl. She approaches* GERONIMO, *unbinds him and lays him down: she gives him water and bathes his face. As he comes to himself she gives him to drink from the bowl: she lights a fire that illuminates the cavern.*]

[ACHEL *creeps stealthily down the steps and conceals himself behind the rocks in the background.*]

GERONIMO

[*Weakly.*]

What ministering angel succours me and gives me new life?

XILONA

Geronimo . . . it is I, Xilona. Drink this; it will give you strength. (*She puts the bowl to his lips.*)

GERONIMO

You! Who had condemned me to a lingering death, now bring me refreshment? Is this but to prolong my agonies? Do you come to feast your eyes on my sufferings?

XILONA

[*Weeping.*]

Geronimo, must you always be hard and cruel

to me? All, all I have sacrificed for you, and yet nothing matters save to be with you. In my blind rage I condemned you to death — but not to torture. I thought you were dead until but an hour ago; and see! I am by your side to save you. To my love for you I have sacrificed my lover's love for me, and I have sent Xicotencal dishonoured to his death; I have given my faithful Holcan to be slain, for love of you; I have renounced my faith, abandoned my people, and my troops march with the Spaniards against the friends of my country — all for love of you. What have I left, if you now desert me?

GERONIMO

[*Kindly.*]

You bear the burden of your sins and the chastisement of your iniquity. Follow the light within: do penance and be converted. Become a Christian.

XILONA

I will. I will become a Christian, if you will show me the way. Will you not come with me and sustain me? There is a passage leading from this cavern to the great river that flows into the sea, and once there, we will cross to Yucatan. Oh! let us leave this land of strife and calamity! Let us forget forever the misery and sorrow of these days and devote our lives to uplifting my poor people.

GERONIMO

Princess Xilona, God has marked you for His own. I perceive that there is enthroned within you a beautiful soul predestined by divine grace to work the salvation of your people. Your life and powers belong to them whom Providence has entrusted to you.

XILONA

I love my people, but must I starve my heart?

GERONIMO

It is your soul you are starving. Your soul cries out for light, for grace to win your eternal salvation. You have sinned as great saints have sinned; repent as they repented, and redeem your faults by harvesting souls in Yucatan. Embrace the Cross and you will win the crown.

XILONA

Teach me the faith. Make me a Christian.

GERONIMO

Above the horizon of this heathen land, saddened by the abominations of Satan's acolytes, the glorious sign of our salvation now rises. In the cross is life and joy of spirit; in the cross is health of soul and the pledge of bliss eternal. The road to paradise is the way of the cross. By my sacramental power, I will cheat the devil of your soul. I will give you a

new name — the name of her who was chosen to bear the incarnate Saviour — for to you it is given to bear to the Indian nations of this new world their Redeemer. I give you the ever-glorious name of Mary. Mary, I baptise thee. . . .

[*He baptises her with water from the pool, turning his back to the audience and leaving the remaining words inaudible. The figures of* XILONA *and* GERONIMO *are lighted by the glare of the fire.* ACHEL'S *face is seen in a reflected light as he watches them with impotent malignity.*]

GERONIMO

Blessed and sanctified shall be your soul, for it shall become the habitation of the spirit of truth and shall radiate throughout these nations which sin and groan in the night of ignorance, the blessed light of salvation. Great are the generations of holy women, servants of God, whom the decree of His vicar has elevated upon the altars of the Church universal; and in this august, never-ending procession that marches through the ages to its goal of eternal glory I see your form — Mary — Xilona — the first princess of your race to be ransomed by the lustral waters of baptism.

XILONA

Behold in me a servant of the Cross. I will see

as you see, I will think as you think, I will feel as you feel. My life is henceforth consecrated to my people.

GERONIMO

And I will come to Labna and there cultivate the vineyard of the Lord: but not yet, for my place is now in Mexico. I must go to Mexico.

[XILONA *gives him the torch.*]

XILONA

Follow the stream through the cavern: it will lead you to safety, outside the fortress, from whence the road to Mexico is before you.

GERONIMO

Farewell, Xilona. I go to Mexico.

[*He goes, bearing the torch. From the depths of the cavern he turns, raises the torch.*]

Farewell, Mary!

XILONA

Where you go, there will I follow, for I have no country where you are not, and I know no God whom you do not adore.

[*She ascends the steps.*]

[ACHEL, *with a gesture of suppressed rage and determination, follows cautiously after her.*]

Scene IV

Xilona, Achel, *Three Indians.*

In a forest. A clearing on the brow of a rocky cliff, above which towers the Aztec fortress. The background shows a stupendous view of the volcano, all white, with a red glow on its summit. A deep ravine separates the volcano from the scene in front. The moon has risen and throws a white light over the distant snowy slope, while the foreground is in a black shadow of the giant trees. To the left, on the brow of the cliff, projects a bough from which is hanging the body of General Xicotencal. Guerrero *has been burned alive, and his charred body still hangs in chains over glowing embers. On the left side another bough projects higher up. On this dead, leafless branch are perched two or three gigantic vultures, waiting for the dead bodies. A path descends from the fortress above, at the end of which stands a gigantic stone idol.*

Enter Xilona, *coming down from the fortress. She starts back on seeing the dead bodies.*

XILONA

[*Drawing her veil across her face to shut out the sight.*]

Alas! Alas! what waters shall wash from my

hands the guilt of this brave soldier's death? His life he prized little, but oh! his honour — dearer than life — he sold for love of me, and was unrequited. I dare not look! O God of the Christians, my first prayer to Thee is for mercy on this man, betrayed to a shameful death through loving over-much, and for pardon — pardon for my treachery to him and to his people!

[*She sees the vultures perching on the dead bough and waves her hands to frighten them, but they remain motionless.*]

XILONA

The vultures! Fly hence, foul birds! Touch not the flesh of the dead brave! Fly hence, fly hence! Oh, let me begone from this tryst of horrors, the sight of which shatters me.

[*She starts to go.*]

[*Enter* ACHEL, *suddenly, from the fortress path.*]

ACHEL

This is a fit place for the last meeting between you and me, and with these witnesses and their watchers.

[*He motions to the dead men and the birds.*]

XILONA

Stop me not. I go to Mexico.

ACHEL

To Mexico? Listen to my words, Xilona, daughter of Labna. Your father gave you as a child into my keeping that I might fit you to succeed him, and our people never miss the heir the gods denied. Years of my life did I devote to teaching you all that a man-ruler should know.

XILONA

I was your creature, taught by your serpent wisdom; through my weak hands your rule over the nation would be supreme.

ACHEL

I delivered you to our people — a perfect woman to be their queen, but you have yielded to evil and betrayed your country and your faith.

XILONA

No; 'tis you and your priests who have enslaved the souls of the people, the better to rule their bodies. Like a black cloud shutting off the sunshine from the earth, so have your evil inventions obscured the pure doctrine of our early faith.

ACHEL

Traitress, apostate! Behold your bridegroom (*turns her forcibly so as to face the hanging man*)— him who was foreordained to be your mate and father of a race of Maya in Yucatan. He was indeed a

man, a man with every virtue, every grace; brave in war, wise in peace, tender in love: a child of fate set as standard-bearer of our race in its hour of greatest danger. From him you were turned by illicit love that struck like a doubly-poisoned dart into your heart, to follow a heathen stranger — a captive slave who mocked our gods, confederated with his countrymen to subjugate all Mexico, and who despises you. Give yet pause to this fond fancy, lest your name go down through all the coming cycles as that of a royal wanton, who sacrificed her people and gave herself, unsought, to their destroyer.

XILONA

Sir, your speech is both false and over-free. I have sinned, but I have sat in the dust of affliction and worn upon my head the ashes of compunction. By the sacramental power of a religion of mercy unknowable to vampires of your breed, my repentance is made acceptable, and my soul is cleansed. Your power over me is broken and through me you shall never rule, for I am a Christian. (*She makes the sign of the cross.*) The light of truth begins to shine through your darkness — it may yet shine on Labna and on my people. (*She starts to go, but* ACHEL *intercepts her.*) Stand from my path, for I want no more of you and your false gods.

ACHEL

You shall not go.

XILONA

Sir, am I not Princess in Labna? Obey. I go to Mexico — and to the Christians.

[*She moves forward.* ACHEL, *without a word, seizes her, draws his knife and plunges it into her breast.*]

XILONA

[*Shrieking.*]

The black wings! Under the shadow of the wings! I die!

[*Her cloak drops from her shoulders, and she falls upon it. The moon's rays fall upon where she lies at the foot of a gigantic idol.*]

ACHEL

To the gods of Anáhuac I offer my supreme and ultimate sacrifice — the life of Xilona, Princess of Labna. The hour of the downfall of our race has come. The strong men are betrayed by women. Treason everywhere amongst the tribes and peoples of Anáhuac. Oh! blind fools! But for your treachery this great empire had not fallen. Your payment shall be in kind, for your fatuous hopes of vengeance on the Mexicans shall be thwarted, and your traitors' souls be damned to all eternity. And you Mexicans who survive your country's ruin, hold

us faithful ones in remembrance! You shall greet one another with weeping in the accursed days to come. Your food shall be made bitter and your drink shall be made bitter in the days of your slavery to the stranger. Your voices shall forget to sing and your feet shall no longer dance, nor shall your sad eyes be gladdened by beholding things of joy. Amidst the future races of this land you shall be a silent people. The prophecies of old are now fulfilled; and to-day the sun of Anáhuac sets forever in a sea of blood, and the name of a great people becomes but a memory. I am high priest of Yucatan. Never will I bow beneath the yoke of alien servitude, nor bend my knee before the Spanish god.

[*He signals, and three Indians appear. They make a litter of branches.* XICOTENCAL'S *body is cut down and reverently laid upon the litter, which the men raise. The other Indian lights a torch.*]

ACHEL

Come, Xicotencal, last of our warriors, last of our braves! together with me, Achel, last of the priests! Let us now go hence to our refuge within the holy mountain. Within its walls of ice there dwell the spirits of our kings and priests of old, guarded by the eternal fires that blaze from its summit. Into these fiery depths — our last, our only refuge — we

will descend together — the last of the warriors and the last of the priests — together — together.

[*The little procession forms. First the Torch-bearers, then the Bearers with the litter, and last* ACHEL *going up a steep path which obviously leads to the crater of the volcano.*

The body of PRINCESS XILONA *lies at the foot of the gigantic idol, where* ACHEL *has laid her.*

GERONIMO, *bearing aloft the torch, pushes aside the creepers that all but conceal the entrance to the cavern under the fortress, and enters. He presently perceives* XILONA'S *body. He kneels beside her, raises her up and finds she is dead, with* ACHEL'S *sacrificial knife beside her. With arms outstretched in prayer and his eyes raised to heaven, he exclaims:*]

GERONIMO

Xilona, virgin and martyr!

[*A nimbus forms about her head, and the vultures drop silently into the abyss.*]

CURTAIN

III

THE VICTORIOUS DUCHESS

A Comedy in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

SISTO SANTUCCI, *an escaped Convict.*
DON MARCO DI TERAMO.
GUIDO, *Duke of Teramo, his elder brother.*
FILIPPO DI ROSSI, *a Neapolitan; Agent of the French Embassy.*
MARQUIS DEI SESTRI, *a gambler.*
NEGRONI, *a doctor.*
MONSIGNOR SERAFINI, *Chaplain to the Duchess.*
VALENTINI, *a lawyer.*
A ROMAN CARDINAL.
GELASIO, *a footman at La Marinella's.*
TORQUATO, *a footman.*
DUCHESS OF TERAMO.
MARI 'ELENA SANTUCCI, *known as La Marinella.*
COUNTESS CAVALESE.
DONNA ANGELA, *her daughter.*
BARONESS OTTAVIA } *Relatives to the Duchess.*
DONNA FRANCESCA }
LADY CHARLES WICKLOW, *an American divorcée.*
MRS. MONTGOMERY-POTTS, *her sister, a widow.*
MADAME DUBOSC, *housekeeper at La Marinella's.*
TERESA, *maid to the Duchess.*

Women of the demi-monde at La Marinella's; Noble-guards, French Officers, Diplomats and Roman Gentlemen.

The action of the play, which is laid in Rome in the year 1867, begins at seven o'clock in the evening and finishes at eleven the following morning. Two stage settings are required. One represents a stately, rather sombrely magnificent salon in a XVIIth Century Roman palace. The other represents a showy, garish room of the second empire. The costumes are in the height of the prevailing fashion of that period, showing great variety and every eccentricity affected by the belles and the fops of the day.

ACT I

ACT I

(*To play one hour*)

Scene I

The private salon of the Duchess of Teramo; a stately, sombre room in the palatial Roman style; the walls are covered with red damask on which hang many portraits of ancestors; the ceiling is of carved, gilded wood. Entrances through double doors set in Renaissance frames of mottled marble to the right and left front and in the centre back; also a small damask-covered door to the right back. Centre doors are open, showing room beyond in which a charity bazaar is being held; people seen moving to and fro. A large open fireplace supported by caryatides and surmounted by a mirror in richly gilded frame, to the right; opposite it stands a massive inlaid cabinet with many drawers. The furniture consists of a pair of gilt consoles, right and left back; and of stiff, ponderous chairs, covered with damask; a round table near the fireplace, by which stands two throne-like armchairs. Before the fireplace stands a

large brass brazier of charcoals; a few chaises volantes of gilded wood and a three-panel screen of tapestry, about five feet high; there is no carpet on the floor, which is of coloured marbles laid in a pattern and highly polished. The room is lighted by candles in massive gilt candelabra on the chimney-piece and another on the table; the great chandelier has unlighted candles in it. To the left of the centre door hangs a large portrait of the late Duke, dressed as a Knight of Malta; this portrait hangs low down on the wall and swings on hinges; it conceals the opening to a secret staircase. The DUCHESS *is seated at the tea-table; she is a handsome, dignified, distinguished-looking woman something past forty, beautifully but rather soberly dressed in the best prevailing fashion.*

Eight persons are seated in the room besides the DUCHESS. BARONESS OTTAVIA *is a portly woman past fifty; she is dressed in dingy mourning and wears a mantilla and some massive old-fashioned cameo jewellery and carries a reticule containing a large prayer book; also a large rosary; she is dark-browed and swarthy, with a visible moustache and a conspicuous mole on her chin.*

DONNA FRANCESCA *is a thin, nervous-looking old maid in the forties; she is fancifully dressed in a pathetic imitation of the prevailing fashions, car-*

ries a fan which she constantly manipulates, and a beaded bag in which is a small mirror; she has quick, bird-like movements.

Lady Charles *is middle-aged, showily dressed, very artificial and affected; she has a very small dog, beribboned, on a chain.*

Mrs. Montgomery Potts, *portly, pompous, richly dressed.*

A Cardinal, *correctly dressed, accompanied by a Prelate, also correctly dressed, is seated near tea table. As curtain rises the* Cardinal *is taking leave and is escorted through centre doors by the* Duchess, *followed by the Prelate. Every one rises, ladies curtsey, etc.*

Negroni *is shabbily dressed in colours; he is a middle-aged man, wears an obvious wig and has moustache and imperial.*

Valentini *is a thick, ponderous man, dressed in shabby black.*

Torquato *serves tea, etc.*

DUCHESS

[*Rising to accompany* Cardinal.]
Your Eminence must really go?

CARDINAL

The Canonical hour; I am never out after the Ave Maria. I congratulate you, Duchess, on your successful bazaar.

DUCHESS

It was too kind of Your Eminence to come. We have done what we could.

CARDINAL

Ah, would that more followed your example!
[*Exeunt.*]

LADY CHARLES

Do let us sit down again; standing is fatiguing.

FRANCESCA

Very good for one's figure though.

LADY CHARLES

Everything that is good for one is so tiresome. (*Seats herself.*) I'll stand some other time; just now, I must finish my tea comfortably. Isn't the Cardinal delightful? Nowadays one meets so few men like that amongst the clergy.

NEGRONI

It has been remarked that vocations to the priesthood amongst the Roman aristocracy are diminishing in proportion to the shrinkage of the Pope's temporal dominions.

OTTAVIA

Negroni, don't be flippant. It is bad taste to joke about the clergy, especially before Protestants. (*Glares at* Mrs. Potts *and* Lady Charles.)

LADY CHARLES

[*Fussily.*]

I am sure, Donna Ottavia, I feel just as Roman as you do; I am devoted to the Pope.

NEGRONI

A Papist, but not a Catholic.

LADY CHARLES

And I am most interested in religion. I went to that French Abbé's sermons at St. Louis all during Lent and he almost converted me.

OTTAVIA

His sermons were not at all to my liking.

NEGRONI

He made religion so attractive, Donna Ottavia could hardly believe it was true.

LADY CHARLES

I loved to watch his dear, little, aristocratic, white hands. And I was told there was a mystery about him, about his birth. I am sure it is all true.

MRS. POTTS

Well, for my part I find Cardinals rather oppressive in society and I never before saw one at a charity bazaar. Of course, the Duchess can get anybody she wants. Didn't I hear that Countess

Cavalese and her daughter had arrived from Milan? I don't see them.

FRANCESCA

They arrived yesterday. They have gone to drive on the Pincio.

MRS. POTTS

I am crazy to see her. (DUCHESS *resumes her place.*)

OTTAVIA

My dear Duchess, you must be worn out; you are a martyr to charity.

DUCHESS

It is a long time, Ottavia. I am accustomed to being tired.

[*Enter* MARINELLA *and* DUBOSC *leisurely, centre.*]

MRS. POTTS

I did want to see Countess Cavalese, but it is getting late, and everybody is going. (*To* LADY CHARLES.) She is sure to be at the Crescenzi ball to-night.

LADY CHARLES

Of course; well, let us go then.

MRS. POTTS

[*Staring fixedly.*]

Good heavens! Look, Delia; look at that woman.

LADY CHARLES

[*Fumbling her lorgnette.*]

Who? Where? *Mon Dieu!* why, it is the dancer, La Marinella.

MRS. POTTS

Precisely; sit down.

LADY CHARLES

Wild horses could not drag me from here till I have seen the end of this.

FRANCESCA

[*Sotto voce to* NEGRONI.]

Has the Duchess seen her? For sheer insolence! Something ought to be done, Negroni.

NEGRONI

Not by us; the Duchess may be trusted to dispose of her.

[MARINELLA *has leisurely approached the tea-table; the* DUCHESS *sits rigid, ignoring her.*]

MARINELLA

I trust I am not taking too great a liberty by intruding in your salon, Duchess.

DUCHESS

[*Icily.*]

This room, Signora, is for to-day a salesroom, open to the public.

MARINELLA

I had expected to meet your son, Don Guido, here, and to ask him to present me to you.

DUCHESS

I am compelled to ignore many of the Duke's appointments and the persons to whom he gives them. (*She rises.*)

MARINELLA

Since I find myself in a public salesroom, I presume I may purchase some tea.

DUCHESS

[*To Footman.*]

Torquato, serve the tea.

[*Exit into her room left.* TORQUATO *serves tea to* MARINELLA *and* DUBOSC, *who stand.*]

DUBOSC

[*Angry.*]

Quelle impertinence! You had no business to come here, and I told you so. Bah! even the tea is bad.

MARINELLA

It is charity tea, and consequently cold. What else can you expect from Pharisees. Pay the man.

[DUBOSC *begins to count out money from her bag;* MARINELLA *impatiently seizes it, and throws a roll of notes on Footman's salver.* DUBOSC *scandalised.*]

MARINELLA

[*In a loud voice.*]
If there is nothing else here for sale, we may go.
[*Exeunt centre door. Exclamations as soon as they vanish.*]

LADY CHARLES

What do you say to that?

MRS. POTTS

Did you hear what she said about the Duke being here to introduce her to his mother?

NEGRONI

Guido is capable of it; I only wonder he failed to turn up.

FRANCESCA

Guido is a beast.

MRS. POTTS

All Rome will ring with this. Even Don Guido will find such publicity too much.

NEGRONI

Guido is indifferent to publicity. He has adopted the principle that nothing more closely resembles innocence than indiscretion.

OTTAVIA

I am amazed to hear that he has adopted any principle — even a wrong one.

NEGRONI

A man who acts on principle is sure to become either dangerous or ridiculous, and a Duke of Teramo who drives with La Marinella in the Corso, nursing her pet dog, is both.

FRANCESCA

Oh, scandalous!

LADY CHARLES

But nothing compared to giving her a rendezvous in his mother's salon.

[*Enter* ROSSI.]

ROSSI

How d'ye do, Mrs. Montgomery-Potts?

MRS. POTTS

How d'ye do, Rossi?

ROSSI

What is the American custom? Does one congratulate your sister on her divorce?

MRS. POTTS

I tell her she ought to send announcement cards to let people know she has resumed her first husband's name. She is now Lady Charles again.

ROSSI

It is really a form of social resurrection for poor old Lord Charles; it will keep his memory green, and

I see she has got the custody of the dog. How d'ye do, Lady Charles? How d'ye do, Donna Ottavia? (*Sotto voce.*) You heard about Lady Charles getting a divorce?

OTTAVIA

Divorce may be the custom amongst American tribes, but in Rome it is not recognised. I take no interest in milady whatever she calls herself; she is always getting into some mess.

ROSSI

This time she has just got out of one. How d'ye do, Francesca?

FRANCESCA

Here you are at last, Pippo, after everything is over and everybody gone.

LADY CHARLES

Why didn't you come to the bazaar, Rossi?

ROSSI

Not I; I am not in favour of relieving the poor. Poverty is the only picturesque possession left us and I am opposed to abolishing it. Fancy Italy without beggars! Just to please the Duchess, however, I sent my contribution to the bazaar.

FRANCESCA

Yes, one of your charming watercolours. It is so nice for a man to paint.

ROSSI

Only as a pastime; 'pon my word I think it odiously vulgar to attach a money value to pictures.

NEGRONI

I never heard of anybody attaching money value to yours.

LADY CHARLES

What were we talking about when you came in? Oh, yes, of course, La Marinella.

ROSSI

A fruitful theme; what about her?

FRANCESCA

She has been here.

LADY CHARLES

In a ravishing Paris toilette.

MRS. POTTS

Worth.

ROSSI

Well, after all, if the Duchess opens her house to the public,—

NEGRONI

To the public in a fashion, yes, but not to public women.

ROSSI

Negroni, your sentiments reflect the collective ignorance of the community. La Marinella is not a public woman.

OTTAVIA

She is a public scandal.

LADY CHARLES

If half one hears about her is true — however, I don't want to throw stones at her.

ROSSI

That shows your wisdom, Lady Charles; women should never throw stones, for they can't throw straight.

MRS. POTTS

How old do you suppose she really is?

ROSSI

No idea; younger than most women, I should say.

LADY CHARLES

That is of no consequence, a woman is as old as she looks.

FRANCESCA

[*Aside to* NEGRONI.]

Let us hope that isn't true of Lady Charles.

MRS. POTTS

And then I suppose she was cleverly made up; all actresses are.

ROSSI

Not any more; they have ceased to want to be mistaken for ladies.

FRANCESCA

Well, I thought her already too plump: let her think of herself at forty.

ROSSI

To preserve her illusions about the present is sufficient for any woman without thinking about the future. Thinking is a most unfeminine occupation and no beautiful woman should ever think at all.

MRS. POTTS

Oh, you are behind the times, Rossi; the modern woman thinks.

ROSSI

Let her think twice then and she'll stop. La Marinella, you may be sure, is guided by an instinctive and subtle philosophy peculiar to her sex. She leads a life of pleasure, and pleasures are the best antidote to advancing age.

NEGRONI

Not an antidote, only a narcotic; pleasures merely stupify, Pippo.

ROSSI

Strip life of its pleasures and you rob death of its terrors.

FRANCESCA

[*Giggling.*]
Oh, isn't he dreadful!

OTTAVIA

Francesca, don't fidget. This conversation is too advanced for me. In my day ballet dancers and their wickednesses were not discussed in good society.

ROSSI

My dear Donna Ottavia, your memory is certainly inaccurate. My recollection is quite different, anything described as wicked has always been fascinating. Where is the Duchess?

FRANCESCA

Gone to her room; driven out of her own salon by La Marinella.

VALENTINI

[*Sighs.*]
Oh, *Madonna mia!*

ROSSI

That does not sound like her. The Duchess is not given to retreating. Is it true, Valentini, that Guido has put a second mortgage on the Castelferrato estate?

VALENTINI

Eh? What? Oh, don't ask me! I know nothing — nothing about it.

NEGRONI

You are the family lawyer; it is your business to know.

OTTAVIA

It is Valentini's business to hold his tongue, and not talk family secrets for the entertainment of the town gossips.

ROSSI

With the historic Cellini plate exposed for sale at a Jew money-lender's, and the ball-room tapestries hanging in a Ghetto pawn shop, it is idle for the friends of Casa Teramo to play the ostrich, Baroness. Guido has mortgaged and sold, he has borrowed and begged until everybody avoids him, and it is now said he actually takes money from La Marinella.

NEGRONI

Such depravity is enough to make respectability fashionable in Rome.

FRANCESCA

That odious Guido! How can any woman be in love with such a man?

ROSSI

She is not in love with him. La Marinella never wastes her charms on the unprofitable: she only fascinates those who are worth fascinating. There is

some mystery. Why does she tolerate a man whose vices are as unattractive as most people's virtues.

OTTAVIA

Gesu Maria! What a conversation!

FRANCESCA

What is that dreadful gambling game they play at her house called?

OTTAVIA

Francesca! At your age!

FRANCESCA

I have not yet reached the age when one parts company with good manners.

ROSSI

They play *rouge et noir* and also baccarat. The Marquis dei Sestri usually takes the bank and he wins thousands for her every night.

FRANCESCA

The wicked monster.

OTTAVIA

Right under the shadow of St. Peter's dome! This is the consequence of the Italian revolution and the French occupation. I foresaw it, I foretold it, and now the days of Antichrist are upon us! (*Crosses herself and resumes her prayers.*)

NEGRONI

Eight thousand scudi a month and nothing less, I am told, she clears from her gaming-table alone. That is a pretty figure. *Che diavolo!* Why doesn't the government stop it? Where are the police?

ROSSI

It is an open secret that La Marinella is in the pay of the French. They say she enjoys high favour in Paris — in fact, ahem! the very highest favour.

FRANCESCA

Napoleon? Oh, you shocking Pippo!

NEGRONI

The woman is a spy.

LADY CHARLES

Does any one know who she really is?

ROSSI

She is from Naples, and some say her father was a Carbonaro. I remember seeing her dance at the San Carlo twelve years ago. What dancing! All Naples was at her feet. That was just after the Duchess was left a widow and returned to Rome. Ah! those were the brilliant days — that was life! We shall never see the like of it again in Italy, certainly not in Rome under Papal rule. Heavens!

we live in a sacristy here and the fashionable perfume is stale incense. When Naples became a province of the new Italy, La Marinella betook herself to fresh triumphs in Paris and I followed the Duchess, to Rome. And look now at the illustrious house of Teramo. Beggared, and Guido actually living on La Marinella's money!

FRANCESCA

Suppose she means to marry him?

VALENTINI

Oh, *Madonna mia!*

OTTAVIA

Oh! Oh! Oh! The poor, dear Duchess would never survive the disgrace! Her eldest son!

ROSSI

We all know she wishes Guido were not that. If the Duchess had her way, it is Marco who would be Duke.

NEGRONI

If she really wants it so, thus it will somehow come about. The Duchess usually gets her way.

ROSSI

Even fifty years ago it would have still been easy enough to eliminate the obnoxious elder brother — a fresh fig for his breakfast or a cup of coffee after

his dinner — but in these degenerate days, it is not to be thought of. All the good old Roman customs are vanishing.

OTTAVIA

[*Severely.*]

There are subjects better not discussed in this house.

ROSSI

But this is not one of them. The Duchess takes no pains to conceal her preference for Marco. Guido is his father's son while Marco is hers and. . . .

OTTAVIA

Pippo! You are treading on delicate ground.

NEGRONI

Very indelicate ground, I call it.

ROSSI

Don't be silly, good people: I know the ground I am treading. When Marco comes out of his naval school a year hence he will be enjoyed as one of Nature's broadest practical jokes. Look at the faces of these Dukes of Teramo (*indicating the portraits*) beginning with the late unlamented Gianpaolo, and all the way back to Elderico, who fought at Barletta. Is there one of them to whom Marco bears the smallest resemblance? If you want to behold his profile, look at the Neapolitan coinage of 1850.

OTTAVIA

[*Solemnly.*]

Pippo di Rossi, remember the honour of the House of Teramo.

ROSSI

Nobody can remember what never existed. The House of Teramo is rich in honours but poor in honour. All the men were false and all the women faithless, sums up its history. Our dear Duchess was married when hardly more than a child to a man double her age — and such a man! Much may be forgiven an ill-mated couple, who have nothing, not even their dislikes, in common.

FRANCESCA

Oh, Pippo! You are really too scandalous!

ROSSI

Mysterious and awe-inspiring is the power of scandal.

VALENTINI

[*Sighs.*]

Oh, *Madonna mia!*

[*Enter the* DUCHESS.]

DUCHESS

[*Smiling and saluting.*]

Good evening, Pippo. Valentini, do count this money. (*She gives him a bag.*) I am sure we have

made a good round sum. I thought people would never leave.

FRANCESCA

As long as you were there, how could any one leave?

OTTAVIA

You sacrifice yourself in a holy cause. San Pantaleone says. . . .

FRANCESCA

Oh! never mind what San Pantaleone says, Ottavia. You do seem to know talkative saints.

OTTAVIA

Don't be flippant, Francesca. It does not become your years.

FRANCESCA

Cultivate San Bruno — he never spoke at all.

ROSSI

Did my picture sell?

DUCHESS

Well, no, not precisely. But we raffled it at the end and got one hundred and sixty francs for it.

ROSSI

Very fair! Very fair! And who drew it?

DUCHESS

Princess Crescenzi.

ROSSI

Excellent! The Crescenzi Collection of water-colours is one of the best in Italy and the Princess Adela is a woman of exceptional taste — quite a critic — my little sketch will be in good company.

DUCHESS

As a matter of fact, Adela Crescenzi said she would give it to the Blind Asylum, of which she is patroness.

NEGRONI

Just the place for it!

[FRANCESCA *giggles, but the others look surprised and severe, so she changes to a cough.*]

OTTAVIA

Francesca! don't fidget.

ROSSI

[*Peevishly.*]

Stop your silly tittering, Francesca.

MRS. POTTS

All Rome was at the bazaar, I suppose?

DUCHESS

So it seemed to me. Everybody one knew and hordes of people I never set eyes on — and such peo-

ple. Still, I noticed the most objectionable-looking ones spent the most money. Have you finished counting, Valentini?

VALENTINI

All but the small coin, Your Excellency. There are more than eight hundred scudi; the odds and ends will easily make it eight hundred and fifty.

DUCHESS

Never mind the odds and ends. Put it back in the bag.

[*She takes the bag and puts it in one of the cabinet drawers.*]

FRANCESCA

Oh, splendid! What a successful bazaar!

ROSSI

And the Countess Cavalese and Donna Angela — where are they?

FRANCESCA

[*Ecstatically.*]

Sweet creature, Donna Angela!

OTTAVIA

The name of Cavalese has a bad odour in Rome. Liberals from Milan: and Giulio Cavalese was a friend of Cavour, and even of Garibaldi. (*She crosses herself.*)

DUCHESS

I sent them to drive on the Pincio. I was really too tired to go, and besides, I had to stop at home to meet Marco.

FRANCESCA

Oh, the dear boy!

ROSSI

What is Marco doing in Rome at this season?

DUCHESS

That I don't know. I wrote him I would take the Cavaleses to Gaeta the day after to-morrow, to see him and visit the ships. Instead of waiting for us, he sent me a message last night, saying he would arrive this evening for a stay of only twenty-four hours. That is all I know.

LADY CHARLES

Impatient to see Donna Angela, no doubt.

ROSSI

Ah! *la jeunesse! la jeunesse!*

OTTAVIA

It is very unfortunate they should be Milanese — such a revolutionary place. San Carlo Borromeo. . . .

ROSSI

The property is also Milanese; and I understand it is a very fine one.

FRANCESCA

Mercenary! I am sure Donna Angela seems quite like a Roman.

MRS. POTTS

She will Romanise fast enough.

ROSSI

You forget Don Marco is a Neapolitan.

OTTAVIA

[*Contemptuously.*]

There are no Neapolitans — they are now all Italians — whatever that means!

LADY CHARLES

Well, I think the Cavalese too lovely and so clever. I hear she has written a book.

OTTAVIA

She is sure to be on the Index.

ROSSI

She would look better as a frontispiece. What a complexion!

FRANCESCA

C'est merveilleux! How does she do it?

DUCHESS

She eats an apple every morning.

FRANCESCA

[*Excited.*]

An apple! That sounds simple. (*She looks at herself in a vanity glass.*)

OTTAVIA

It sounds suspicious. All the troubles of this world began with a woman eating an apple.

DUCHESS

Do forgive me, dear friends, but I must send you all away. I expect Marco any minute — in fact, he should now be here, and I want to see him alone before Cavalese's return.

[*All rise to take leave, with many exclamations and gestures.* LADY CHARLES *and* MRS. POTTS *off together, first.*]

OTTAVIA

Good night, dear Duchess. I wanted to talk to you about the pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loretto — you must be one of our patronesses; but another time will do. I have a meeting of the Rosary Society at my house in half-an-hour, after which we must finish the novena for the holy souls in purgatory.

ROSSI

The rake's progress!

[*Exit* OTTAVIA.]

Good night, Duchess. Do we meet at the Crescenzi's ball?

DUCHESS

You know I never go to balls, Rossi.

ROSSI

Therefore they seem dull affairs to me. But what can I do? I must go.

DUCHESS

Take a night off and rest.

ROSSI

Impossible. If it were work I might, but this is amusement. Ah! *tempi passati! tempi passati!* (*Exit.*)

FRANCESCA

I thought you might be taking the Cavaleses to the ball.

DUCHESS

No, not even for Donna Angela will I begin again to go to late affairs. Oh, Francesca! I told Teresa you were to have those white lace flounces of mine. I hope you will like them.

FRANCESCA

Oh! a thousand thanks. They are point d'Alençon and too heavenly! My dress is rose-colour — the flounces will make it perfect — a dream, a dream! Good-night, dear Duchess! I must see Teresa. Lace flounces! (*Exit.*)

NEGRONI

Fancy Donna Francesca in rose-colour and white lace flounces!

DUCHESS

Ah! Negroni, Francesca is fortunate enough to be still able to wear rose-colour — to see things rose-colour. Such easy consolations are not given to all of us. Good-night, dear friend.

NEGRONI

[*Kissing her hand.*]

Everything is rose-colour to those who possess your friendship. (*Exit.*)

DUCHESS

If you have any news for me, Valentini, it is sure to be bad, so we will let it wait until to-morrow.

VALENTINI

There is nothing of importance, Your Excellency. My profoundest homage. (*Exit.*)

[*Enter* TERESA, *crossing* VALENTINI *at the door.*]

[TORQUATO *extinguishes some candles; closes centre doors and removes the tea table.*]

TERESA

Don Marco has arrived and asks for Your Excellency.

DUCHESS

Yes! Yes! Show him in. Where is he? And, Teresa, bring my chocolate.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

[*Enter* MARCO. *He is aged twenty: is handsome and wears a naval cadet's uniform.*]

MARCO

Madre cara! Ah! madre cara! (*He embraces her.*)

DUCHESS

Marco *carissimo!*

MARCO

Teresa said you were expecting me, so I did not wait to be announced.

DUCHESS

Ah! my dear son! What a pleasure to see you! Let me look at you. Why, what a big man you have grown! I am losing my little son — my sailor boy.

MARCO

No, you are not, *madre cara;* I am ashamed to grow up so fast. But nothing will ever make you

look a day older: call me your younger brother, nobody will ever know the difference.

DUCHESS

You are learning to flatter. Do they teach this in the Italian navy? But why are you suddenly here? Your message saying you were coming almost alarmed me.

MARCO

I had to see you at once, mother; I could not wait a day.

DUCHESS

Sit down — here by me, where I can see your face and hold your hand. Ah! Marco, how I miss you! You are my only joy, my only consolation.

MARCO

But you have Guido here. . . .

DUCHESS

Guido! Don't speak to me of your brother, Marco! He is ruining himself and all of us.

MARCO

Wasting his substance on the beautiful Marinella, I hear.

DUCHESS

You hear such things even in Gaeta?

MARCO

Even in Gaeta.

DUCHESS

We will not spoil this precious hour talking of Guido. Let us talk about you, my son. Now, why have you come?

MARCO

Well, you see, mother, it is like this: I got your letter saying you were bringing Countess Cavalese and her daughter to Gaeta.

DUCHESS

Well, why did you not wait two days and see us there?

MARCO

Because I read between the lines of what you wrote about Donna Angela — about her beauty — and her fortune. . . .

DUCHESS

I meant you to do that, Marco. You are young in years to think of marriage, but your future is so uncertain that I feel this opportunity should not be lost. You are the cadet of our house — unhappily — and there is no provision for you. Even the little I had saved for you is vanishing — eaten up by Guido's extravagance. I have had to sacrifice to him the sums I had put aside for you.

MARCO

You had to?

DUCHESS

For very shame's sake: to stave off a little longer the disgrace he seems bent on bringing upon us all; and now when ruin is literally at our door, appears my old friend, Maria Cavalese, with her only daughter, sole heiress to immense properties; and beautiful, and charming. I have not written you half enough about her, because I want you to discover for yourself how lovely she is.

MARCO

Don't, mother, don't talk of it! That is why I have come, I don't want to see Donna Angela, I don't want to hear about her. It was to prevent you from compromising yourself or me with her mother that I hastened to Rome. I cannot marry Donna Angela.

DUCHESS

You have not even seen her. What can you have against Angela Cavalese?

MARCO

She is a woman.

DUCHESS

That is hardly an objection to marrying her.

MARCO

Yes, it is. She is the wrong woman.

DUCHESS

Do you mean to say there is a right woman?

MARCO

Yes.

DUCHESS

Who is she?

MARCO

I don't know who she is: that is another reason why I have come — to find out.

[*Enter* TERESA. *She carries a silver tray with chocolate.*]

TERESA

Your Excellency's chocolate.

DUCHESS

Put it on the console and leave the room.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

To find out, did you say?

MARCO

Yes, to find out. Listen, mother, and I will tell you my story, for it is not long.

DUCHESS

Long or short, I must hear every word of it. Go on.

MARCO

It happened like this. You remember I had some conditions from my June exams to work off, and so was kept in Gaeta during the September holidays?

DUCHESS

Yes, indeed. It was a cruel disappointment to me that you could not come home. Well?

MARCO

Every morning about nine o'clock, I rowed myself a league down the coast to a small inlet where I used to swim and then take a sun-bath in the warm sands. The little cove was quite shut in and, I thought, entirely solitary; but one day as I lay there, a red rose dropped upon me. I looked at the thick shrubbery on the bank above me, but saw no one; I fell to wondering, when presently a second rose dropped upon me. This time I sprang to my feet and there, framed in the jasmine a few feet above my head, I saw a face — the most beautiful face in the world — as beautiful as yours, *madre cara!*

DUCHESS

A face! Whose face?

MARCO

Elena's.

DUCHESS

Elena! A woman? Spying on you when you were naked?

MARCO

Well — all but —

DUCHESS

The shameless creature!

MARCO

Oh no! She is a widow.

DUCHESS

A widow?

MARCO

I found that out afterwards. At the time — for a moment, I really did not think about clothes — I only thought of the beautiful vision framed in the jasmine.

DUCHESS

That may explain your forgetfulness of propriety, but it does not excuse her immodesty — her effrontery!

MARCO

As soon as I realised, I covered myself with the bath towel.

DUCHESS

The bath towel!

MARCO

It was quite a large one.

DUCHESS

And then what happened?

MARCO

We began to talk.

DUCHESS

About what?

MARCO

About ourselves: I asked her if I might come up to where she was, or would she come down; but she said we must stop where we were. I don't know exactly what we did say. I suppose we talked as people do under such circumstances.

DUCHESS

The circumstances are fortunately so rare, I can imagine no rules to govern them.

MARCO

Then we told one another our names — only our Christian names, for she would not tell me her family name; she said she did not care who I was and would rather not know. She would call me Marco and I must call her Elena, and that was enough; she would not tell me her family name.

DUCHESS

Probably she has none.

MARCO

Oh, yes, she has; she has an aunt.

DUCHESS

That shows some forethought; but aunts abound. Even the most improvident may have an aunt.

MARCO

She said she was staying at her aunt's villa just

above the cove and that she also bathed there every morning at eight o'clock; then she disappeared. The next morning I came at eight o'clock — and so it began. Oh, *madre cara!* I know it sounds strange and unconventional — I realise how hard it is to make you understand. But at the time — in our little cove by the blue sea, everything seemed natural and right — just like in paradise.

DUCHESS

There was a serpent in paradise.

MARCO

There was none in ours; Elena came, every morning with her aunt and her maid, who gave us chocolate and pineapple sherbet after our swim, while we sat under her white umbrella in the warm golden sands. Then they went up the cliff to their villa, and I rowed back to Gaeta. It only lasted a week.

DUCHESS

A week is a long time for paradise.

MARCO

The last day came and Elena told me they were returning to Rome, where she was to stay with her aunt, Mme. Dubosc.

DUCHESS

Dubosc? French, evidently, but I never heard of any Madame Dubosc amongst the French colony

in Rome. Naturally I would hardly hear of women given to indulging in such bohemian antics as you describe.

MARCO

[*Resignedly.*]

I can't make you see how simple it all was.

DUCHESS

Your simplicity is evident enough — as evident as her indelicacy, to use no stronger term.

MARCO

Mother! you must not speak so of Elena; she is to be my wife, for I can never love any other woman. I cannot live without her! I love her! Oh, how I love her!

DUCHESS

This is simply madness. We are too poor, Marco, to be romantic — romance is exclusively the privilege of the rich. You say this woman is beautiful; it is doubtless her business to be beautiful, for beauty is a very marketable possession. As for love, the term is elastic, so we will not discuss that, but when you talk of marriage — you at twenty and penniless — with a woman of whom you know absolutely nothing, not even her name, you rave. And a widow too! Whose widow? She must be years older than you.

MARCO

No! She is as young and fair as a goddess.

DUCHESS

Then she can't be a widow, and there is but one conclusion to be drawn when a young woman masquerades in fictitious weeds. She is scheming to entangle you.

MARCO

But how can that be, when she would not even tell me her name and said we should never meet again?

DUCHESS

She understands the seduction of mystery. Did she give you no clue to her whereabouts in Rome?

MARCO

She gave me her aunt's address.

DUCHESS

[*Laughing in spite of herself.*]
Oh, you naïve child!

MARCO

But I made her give it to me.

DUCHESS

Of course you did — she saw to that. Now listen to me, Marco. I want you to promise not to visit these women until I have made enquiries about them. Give me the address.

MARCO

No, I can't promise. I have come to Rome to find Elena, and I must see her to-night; there is no time to make inquiries, for I must return to Gaeta to-morrow.

DUCHESS

There is plenty of time. I will send Valentini to the chief of police; there they know everything about everybody in Rome, especially foreigners. Within an hour we shall have precise information.

MARCO

The police! Never! It would be an indignity to set police spies on my Elena!

DUCHESS

To consult the police register of foreigners living in Rome puts no indignity on any one. I may be wrong about these women, without your being right, but even you can hardly expect me to consent to your marriage with a woman of whose antecedents and present position you can tell me absolutely nothing.

MARCO

I don't care what they are — she does not care what mine are; we are just two human hearts destined to complete one another and be happy. Surely you want me to be happy? You would not want me to marry a woman I did not love?

DUCHESS

The happiest marriages are not those which begin, but those which end with love. I promise you, Marco, that if upon enquiry we discover this Madame Dubosc to be a lady of reputable position in her own country and that the young woman is a proper wife for you, I will not oppose you. What more can you possibly ask? Before I see these women I must know who they are. When I have seen them, I will tell you what they are.

MARCO

[*Coaxingly.*]

You will love Elena, just as I did, at first sight, for we are alike, you and I, *madre cara.* (*He seeks to embrace her.*)

DUCHESS

[*Repulsing him.*]

No, Marco, this is not a new toy for which you are coaxing a fond mother. From this time forth I shall no longer treat you as a boy but as a man. We will put sentiment aside and act according to common sense. You may rely upon my shedding no tears and making no appeal to the affection I have supposed you felt for me.

MARCO

Supposed I felt! You know, mother, that my love for you is boundless, that I. . . .

DUCHESS

[*Coldly.*]

No! I know nothing, save that you are disobeying me, disappointing me and causing me the greatest pain I have ever known in all my life. All the care and love of which my heart is capable have been given to you — to you alone. Now I see that I really count for nothing at all in your life. Guido's conduct has humiliated my pride, but it was left for you to break my heart — for only you could touch it.

[MARCO *tries to approach her, but she turns coldly away.*]

[*Enter* TERESA.]

TERESA

Countess Cavalese and Donna Angela have returned and ask for Your Excellency.

DUCHESS

Show them in.

MARCO

[*Rising.*]

I shall go then.

DUCHESS

No, please remain: these ladies are guests under our roof, and since you are here, you will do your duty as their host.

MARCO

But I don't want to see them — it is surely much better for me not to see them.

DUCHESS

Marco, you will do as I bid you this evening. You will remain here.

[*Enter* COUNTESS CAVALESE *and* DONNA ANGELA. COUNTESS CAVALESE *is a middle-aged woman; beautifully and very fashionably dressed; her manner is vivacious and her speech decided: she has a managing disposition.* DONNA ANGELA *is a fresh, pretty girl of eighteen, over-shadowed by her mother; she is an accomplished coquette, however, of the demure type, and during the scene she is using her eyes on* MARCO *with visible effect: she is exquisitely dressed in light colours or white, everything about her as dainty and charming as possible.* DON MARCO *begins by being stiff, almost sulky, but visibly thaws under* ANGELA'S *coquetries.*]

COUNTESS

Well, my dear Isabella, here we are back. Such a crowd on the Pincio! And in the Corso as well; the horses fairly crawled the entire way. It reminded me of my father-in-law's funeral.

DUCHESS

This is my son, Marco; Donna Angela.

[MARCO *bows.*]

COUNTESS

[*Expressively.*]

How delightful to see you again, Don Marco. It is a long time, but I should have known you anywhere: you are really not much changed.

DUCHESS

He was aged four when you last saw him, Maria; so I don't know whether you mean to be flattering or not. Sit down: Marco will talk with you while I go and change my dress. He was so impatient to see Angela that he could not wait for us to come to Gaeta, but rushed up to Rome.

[*Exit* DUCHESS *into her room.*]

COUNTESS

So like a sailor! Such daring, impetuous fellows, Angela adores sailors, don't you, dear?

ANGELA

[*Timidly, but shooting a glance at* MARCO.]

Well, mamma, I never saw . . .

COUNTESS

And the sea, and the ships, and all the stories about whales. Now let us sit down and make ac-

quaintance. Angela, my love, sit there. Do tell us about the whales, Don Marco; it will be so interesting.

MARCO

[*Stiffly.*]

I never saw one. There are no whales in the Mediterranean.

COUNTESS

Of course not! How stupid of me! Come to think of it, I meant sharks. I know you have seen sharks and could tell us thrilling tales about them: but don't be too realistic or you will frighten Angela. (*To* ANGELA.) You must not be frightened at Don Marco's stories about sharks, my dear; sailors' stories are never true.

ANGELA

No, mamma.

MARCO

We don't have sharks at Gaeta, Countess. I am afraid the only one I ever saw was in the aquarium at Naples.

COUNTESS

That was much safer. I think all such monsters should be kept in aquariums, especially in Naples. It educates the people, and I am told the Neapolitans are dreadfully ignorant.

MARCO

The Neapolitans have very little to learn from sharks.

COUNTESS

Oh! naughty, naughty! I would not have dared say that about the Neapolitans, but it is each one's privilege to abuse his own people. Are you here for long, Don Marco?

MARCO

I have only twenty-four hours' leave. I return to Gaeta to-morrow afternoon.

COUNTESS

How very flattering your coming! Not for me — you never came all the way from Gaeta to see an old woman like me — but for Angela. You do feel flattered, don't you, my dear?

ANGELA

Yes, mamma.

COUNTESS

That is right. One need never believe flattery, but one should always enjoy it. We don't renounce our visit to Gaeta, however, Don Marco. Angela loves the sea, and she is dying to go on board the warships. She must sing you some of her sailor songs. How does that one "My Rover Bold" go, Angela? "I love my rover bold, tra-la-la-la."

(*She hums.*) Something like that. Such a pretty song, especially with a guitar accompaniment; but I never allow her to sing the last verse, for it ends sadly — quite harrowing, in fact.

MARCO

I am afraid I am not very musical.

COUNTESS

Indeed? Why, I thought all sailors sang and danced. The boatmen on Lake Como are very musical. One of them at Bellagio last summer danced an English step. What was it called, Angela?

ANGELA

The hornpipe, mamma.

COUNTESS

Yes, that is it. Don't you dance the hornpipe, Don Marco?

MARCO

Officers don't dance hornpipes.

COUNTESS

Well, I thought it a very pretty and spirited dance. The Italian navy should adopt English customs. We are all very English now-a-days in Piedmont and Lombardy. Where would United Italy be if it were not for the English?

MARCO

Perhaps the Romans feel under less obligation towards them.

COUNTESS

Naturally: the Romans, being indebted to everybody, are grateful to nobody. I am so glad you are not a Roman, Don Marco. Of course your dear mother is quite an exception; but she has lived so long in Naples and is altogether so clever and charming, she seems quite like a foreigner amongst them. I think it shows a fine spirit on your part going into the Italian navy instead of lounging about the Corso all day. It is such a career for a young man and is becoming every day more popular — far more so than the army, though I really can't see exactly why it should be.

ANGELA

Because a sailor has a wife in every port.

MARCO

Oh!

COUNTESS

Heavens! child, where did you ever hear that?

ANGELA

My English governess, Mrs. Bartlett, told me so.

COUNTESS

And what, pray, does Bartlett know about it?

ANGELA

Her husband is a sailor.

COUNTESS

I did not know she had one. Where is he?

ANGELA

She does not know, but she thinks he is in one of the other ports.

COUNTESS

Well, I don't wonder. (*To* MARCO.) Bartlett is a very superior person — most painstaking and methodical in teaching Angela English, but she is a Scotch Presbyterian of unprepossessing appearance and very grim views of conduct, so it is quite explicable that her husband should seek distraction in foreign ports; but that does not justify her aspersions on His Majesty's navy. I shall reprimand Bartlett severely.

MARCO

[*Smiling.*]

The wife in every port is not one of the English customs you would like introduced into the Italian navy, Countess?

COUNTESS

Dear me! No. At least, not amongst the officers. For the sailors, poor things, it might be tolerated; the women of the lower classes are so rarely

attractive, and then it is reported our maritime population is decreasing. (*Glances at her watch.*) How late it is! We can't talk any more just now about sharks and hornpipes, for we are dining at half-past eight at the Spanish Embassy, and going later to Princess Crescenzi's ball. Perhaps you are coming to the dance.

MARCO

I did not know there was to be one.

COUNTESS

That makes no difference; the Princess will be only too charmed, I am sure. You see, Angela, Don Marco is eager to come, so you must keep him a dance or two, won't you, dear?

ANGELA

Oh, mamma. . . .

COUNTESS

If you will pick us up at the Spanish Embassy at eleven, we will all go on together. That would be perfect.

[*Enter* DUCHESS. *She is dressed in a négligé costume of soft silk, much beflounced.*]

COUNTESS

Don Marco is just arranging to come for us at the Embassy and drive to the Crescenzi's.

DUCHESS

I was reproaching myself for not going with you. Angela's first ball, too! But you see, Maria, I have quite given up balls years ago. With Marco to look after you, you won't miss me.

MARCO

But I have no clothes.

DUCHESS

[*Significantly.*]

You won't mind the absence of clothes.

COUNTESS

What could be more charming than this uniform?

MARCO

[*Saluting.*]

Very well, Countess, I shall call for you at eleven. Good night, mother.

COUNTESS

Au revoir, then, at the Spanish Embassy. Angela dear, go to your room and get ready to dress. I shall follow immediately. If you don't know your way, Don Marco will show you.

ANGELA

Oh, I do know my way perfectly, mamma.

COUNTESS

No, you don't. You are sure to get lost in this

huge palace. I confide you to Don Marco; don't let her get lost.

[*Exeunt* ANGELA *and* MARCO *by centre door.*]

COUNTESS

They make a charming couple, Isabella; Marco is fascinating.

DUCHESS

Fascination is very well in a lover, in a husband it is superfluous. How did they get on together?

COUNTESS

Angela is half in love with him already; I could see that.

DUCHESS

And Marco, how was he? Did he talk?

COUNTESS

A little shy, perhaps — only natural and very becoming in a sailor. Besides, Angela is such a little chatterbox, Marco did not have to talk much.

[*Enter* MONSIGNOR SERAFINI *from small door, left back. He is a typical Roman priest of the middle-class, well dressed in cassock, with purple buttons and stock, wearing a large cloak with cape, and carries his broad-brimmed hat with purple tassels in one hand: purple stockings, buckled shoes, grey hair surmounted by zucchetto of black.*]

DUCHESS

Ah, Monsignor. Are you leaving for Viterbo?

SERAFINI

Yes, Your Excellency. I bring you the keys of my room and the chapel.

DUCHESS

Very well. And have you found some one to catalogue the manuscripts?

SERAFINI

I have a man in view, and on my return the work shall be begun.

DUCHESS

Very good. By the by, did you hear any particulars about the prisoner who escaped yesterday morning from St. Angelo?

SERAFINI

No, Your Excellency, except that he was a very old man who had been many years in the dungeons there — so long, in fact, that nobody now knows who he was or why he was put there. It seems his record has been lost or mislaid.

DUCHESS

Ah? Well, it does not matter.

COUNTESS

Does not matter? It is dreadful! I heard the gun fired early yesterday morning, and it gave me the shivers as I lay in bed, even before I knew what it meant. When they told me it was the signal for the pursuit of an escaped prisoner, I prayed, and I have ever since prayed, that he might get away.

SERAFINI

He will hardly do that. He dug under the walls and got into an underground passage or sewer that leads only to the Tiber; but he won't stop there long, or the rats will eat him; while if he comes out, the patrol boats are watching for him and will surely catch him. If Your Excellency has no further commands, I will take my leave.

DUCHESS

Good night, Monsignore; and *buon viaggio.*

SERAFINI

Grazia. Good night, Your Excellency. Countess.

[*Exit* SERAFINI, *left.*]

COUNTESS

Think of that unhappy old man! Kept like a wild beast in an underground dungeon for years and years, until nobody even knows who he is or why he

was put there! What a barbarous prison system! No wonder Sir Gladstone branded the Neapolitan government as the "negation of God"— and the Pope's is no better.

DUCHESS

My dear Maria, these sentiments may be popular in Milan, but I must caution you not to express them in Rome.

COUNTESS

I would cry them from the house-tops! What would I not do to help that wretched man to escape his pursuers! Think of a human being, crawling through sewers, pursued by rats and the police — vermin both of them! — But if he is wise, he will trust the rats

DUCHESS

The man was doubtless a conspirator of the vilest type: a paid assassin of one of the secret societies. Believe me, your sympathy is misplaced; in any case, premature. Do you realise the time? Your dinner is in half an hour.

COUNTESS

So it is. And yours, my dear? When do you dine?

DUCHESS

Teresa has brought me some chocolate. Since

my cook has gone into politics, I have given up dining.

COUNTESS

Wise woman. Well, I fly.

DUCHESS

I don't envy you. Prepare yourself for a dull dinner. You know everybody collects something in these days, and the Spanish ambassadress collects bores.

COUNTESS

How restful! Excellent preparation for meeting the lions I shall find at the Crescenzi's. I am told Adela's salon is a regular menagerie. Good night, my dear.

[*Exit* COUNTESS.]

DUCHESS

Good night, and *buon divertimento!*

[*Enter* TERESA.]

DUCHESS

Well, Teresa, what is it? Give me my chocolate.

[TERESA *places the chocolate on the table.*]

TERESA

His Excellency the Duke is here.

DUCHESS

At this hour! Did you not say I had retired and could see no one?

TERESA

Yes, Your Excellency, but . . .

[*Enter* GUIDO. *He is a rakish, dissipated-looking man of twenty-four: dark and swarthy, with a sneering, scoffing manner and intonation. He is handsome and smartly dressed. He nonchalantly kisses her hand.*]

GUIDO

She did her little best, *madre mia*, so don't scold the wench.

[*Exit* TERESA, abashed.]

The poor girl is not fit for your service; she lies most clumsily.

DUCHESS

Teresa has only been a short time in Rome.

GUIDO

Fortunate girl, to begin in such a good school!

DUCHESS

Your visits are so rare, Guido, I was not expecting you.

GUIDO

Your cordiality suggests that this one should be brief. I got a message from you a day or so ago, saying you wished to see me — so here I am.

DUCHESS

You have taken your own time. I never see you

any more: I don't even know whether you still live under this roof.

GUIDO

Of course I do. Where else should I live?

DUCHESS

I don't dare to ask, and I don't want to know. Your uncle, Cardinal Gottifreddi, was here on Tuesday; that is why I sent for you. He came to speak about your affairs.

GUIDO

What is the use of his talking if he does nothing for me?

DUCHESS

What can any one do for a man like you? The Cardinal came to warn me of what is imminent.

GUIDO

What do you mean by "what is imminent"?

DUCHESS

I mean that the Pope's patience is exhausted. You must either radically change your ways, or the Minister of Police will order your expulsion from the Papal States. Fortunately I had an answer ready for the Cardinal, and I secured his promise to obtain a little time — enough for you to leave Rome with dignity rather than be escorted to the frontier by the police, like a malefactor or a conspirator.

GUIDO

This might sound ominous were it not so familiar. I seem to have heard these threats before.

DUCHESS

They are no longer threats; they are decisions. The very morning of my brother's visit, I received this letter from your Aunt Olympia, which I showed him. (*She takes a letter from the table drawer.*)

GUIDO

I can't read Aunt Olympia's writing. What does she say?

DUCHESS

She invites you to visit her in Hungary — for a long stay. She has two charming girls stopping with her, both pretty and both daughters of immensely rich Hungarian magnates, either of whom would be happy to become Duchess of Teramo. I promised the Cardinal that you should go.

GUIDO

I don't refuse; no! I don't refuse — but I am not going just now.

DUCHESS

It must be now, or it will be never.

GUIDO

First of all, I have no money. I can't go to Hun-

gary without some money to fling about. The Hungarians are awfully extravagant people.

DUCHESS

Something may still be found, and Olympia, who is rich, will supply what is needed if she sees you are in earnest about marrying. It will all depend on yourself.

GUIDO

Mother, if I had a few thousand francs now — to-night — I could triple it in a few hours, and I would go off to Hungary as a gentleman should. Get me some cash now, mother; I am in luck to-night.

DUCHESS

Gambling! Have you not yet learned that no man is ever lucky when he is needy? Fortune thrusts her favours on the indifferent.

GUIDO

Not always. *Per Bacco!* I have got a system worked out that will break any bank going. Give me a couple of thousand francs, mother, and I'll pay you back to-morrow and have enough left to go off to Hungary in a style befitting the Duke of Teramo; but I won't go amongst those rich barbarians with empty pockets and sponge on my Aunt Olympia. If you want me to go, you must get me the money — and to-night. This is my lucky night.

DUCHESS

Money enough for your visit I may be able to get you; money to gamble with, I can't raise a penny.

GUIDO

If you can find the one, you can find the other. Don't I tell you I'll pay you back? Let me explain my system. It is like this . . .

DUCHESS

I don't want to hear it. I can raise no money myself for any purpose whatsoever. I don't possess a jewel or a trinket of the smallest value. My pearls are false and my diamonds are paste; the little savings I had put by for Marco's education I have sacrificed to your vices.

GUIDO

Ah! you always have a private hoard for Marco. At all costs, that little brat must be kept going, even if I suffer.

DUCHESS

Guido, I forbid you to speak so of your brother.

GUIDO

[*Sneeringly.*]

My brother? Don't lay too much stress on that.

DUCHESS

[*Rising.*]

Will you leave this room or shall I?

GUIDO

[*With sudden fury.*]

I don't leave this room till I get what I have come for, nor do you. Your grand-duchess airs don't impose on me. I know how we stand — you and I. Pack me off a beggar to the other side of Europe, while you hoard up money out of the estate for your son Marco! You think me such a fool? Well, I'll show you I am not. No man of the Teramos' was ever jockeyed or hoodwinked by his women — we know them too well, the whole damned breed, from duchess to courtesan, and mighty little difference is there amongst them. I'll have the money, and I'll have it now. (*He begins to pull open the table drawers, and then rushes to the cabinet.*) To-night my luck is on me: to-night I can win thousands, thousands. Where do you keep it? Where have you hidden it? I must have money — money —(*He finds the bag.*) Ha! ha! ha! I thought so! (*He looks eagerly into the bag.*) I thought so!

DUCHESS

Guido, give me that bag. It is not mine. It is the money from the charity bazaar — the money of the poor.

GUIDO

Well, charity begins at home, and who is poorer than I?

DUCHESS

Give me that bag! Give it to me! Give it to me! (*She tries to take it.*) Guido! I implore you!

GUIDO

I'll give you nothing, until to-morrow. To-morrow I'll repay you — you and your poor twice over.

DUCHESS

Are you a thief? You rob — not your mother — but the poor, God's poor! You shall not commit this outrage! (*Struggling with him.*) I'll call for help. I'll denounce you to the police!

GUIDO

Denounce and be damned. (*Wrenching violently from her, he pushes the* DUCHESS, *who falls to the ground.*] Don't be such a fool, mother. I know what I am doing. Trust me, for the luck is on me to-night. This is my night — my lucky night. (*She weeps.*) Hysterics? Bah! I can't stand them.

[*Exit* GUIDO.]

DUCHESS

[*Rises and moves vaguely about the room: she stops before the large portrait of her husband and addresses it.*]

This unnatural monster is the fruit of our loveless union. He is your dead hand still clutching onto my

life. (*She suddenly utters a sharp cry and springs backwards.*)

[*The picture swings slowly open and reveals a small niche in which crouches* SISTO SANTUCCI. *He is old, emaciated, white-haired; he wears tattered trousers and shirt that expose his naked arms and legs, which are blood-stained: he steps from the opening and staggers towards the* DUCHESS *with trembling, outstretched arms: the picture swings into place.*]

SANTUCCI

[*In a weak, tremulous voice.*]

Signora — for pity's sake! for God's sake! don't! don't! I can harm no one — I am starving; I am dying! Pity! Pity!

DUCHESS

[*Recovering herself.*]

How did you come here?

SANTUCCI

I crawled underground through long, dark passages,— then up many steps until I heard voices. I groped with my hands; feeling the wall, my finger made a hole; the light shone through and I looked into this room. I saw you and the thief.

DUCHESS

Who are you?

SANTUCCI

I . . . I . . .

[*He sinks fainting on the floor. She raises him, looks about, sees the cup of untasted chocolate and brings it, making him drink it: he revives.*]

Thank you. . . . I am sorry . . . but I am so weak; I have had no food for a long time, and I am freezing. Thank you; this gives me life. Did you hear the gun?

DUCHESS

The gun?

SANTUCCI

They fired the gun at the castle, before I could reach the river: after that I dared not come out. And the rats! the rats! See —(*Showing his arms and legs.*) . . . See where they bit me! I fought in the dark where I could see only the gleaming eyes all about me — above my head — everywhere, everywhere the rats tore at me. Once I crawled almost to the opening on the river — just for a little air, but the police were there watching. I could hear them in a boat. I had to turn back and fight the rats.

DUCHESS

Then you are the prisoner who escaped yesterday morning from Castel Sant' Angelo?

SANTUCCI

Was it only yesterday morning? It seems years ago. It is now night. Hush! hush! There are spies everywhere — they listen — they are watching for me. Oh! Signora, don't let them take me back; don't let them! (*He approaches and looks fixedly at her.*) I can hardly see you, for I am nearly blind; I am like the rats — I see best in the dark, where I have lived without the light of day, so my eyes are almost gone. I can just see your face — but you are kind, I feel that, and you will not let them take me back? See! I am an old, old man. I don't know any more how old I am, but I am at the end. May I not die free? Not alone in the icy blackness of that dungeon — oh, not alone, not alone when I die! It will be soon, very soon, but let me die free. Don't, don't give me up! Die free! Die free!

DUCHESS

My poor man, you have nothing to fear from me. I shall not give you up, and I promise you, you shall die free.

SANTUCCI

God bless you! God bless you! There are, then, merciful hearts in the world.

DUCHESS

You are safe here — at least for the present, until

I can think of some refuge for you. But if I am to help you, I must know who you are and why you were in prison.

SANTUCCI

Yes, yes! I will tell you everything — all the story of my ruined life, of my living death.

DUCHESS

Sit here and tell me the truth.

[*He sits by the brazier.*]

SANTUCCI

Signora, I will speak only the truth, for my truth beggars invention. I am Sisto Santucci, of an honourable family in Salerno. As a young man I lived in Naples, where I joined a small club which met to discuss social and political questions, with a view to spreading education amongst the people and to obtain equal political rights and freedom of speech.

DUCHESS

Ah! I see what is coming.

SANTUCCI

The government at that time was the most iniquitous . . .

DUCHESS

Let us not discuss the Neapolitan government. It is your story I want to hear.

SANTUCCI

When I was thirty years old — that was in 1838 — I inherited a small fortune, and I was able at last to claim my promised bride — my beloved Elena.

DUCHESS

Was she from Salerno?

SANTUCCI

No; her family was from Capua and belonged to the nobility of that province. They had opposed our union. But when my fortune came, we eloped and were married. The hatred of her family pursued us and closed all doors in Naples against us, so we moved to Milan, where I got a small position. There our only child — our Mari' Elena — was born. Oh! how happy we were — just we three, with enough for our modest wants and indifferent to all the world outside! Ten years passed — ten years of hard work — and then, in an evil hour, I was chosen with three others to go to Naples. . . .

DUCHESS

Chosen?

SANTUCCI

Yes. The propaganda for a United Italy had by that time been thoroughly organised. . . .

DUCHESS

I understand. You belonged to one of the secret

societies which fomented uprisings in the different States and prepared the revolution.

SANTUCCI

We worked as we could, not as we would.

DUCHESS

I remember the days of 'forty-eight. Well, what did you do in Naples?

SANTUCCI

Nothing. I swear to you, Signora, before God and by all I have suffered that I did nothing in Naples. Three days after I landed there, by sea from Genoa, I attended a meeting in the house of a chemist. . . .

DUCHESS

Chemists were suspects in those days.

SANTUCCI

The purpose of the meeting was to decide upon certain regulations for the formation of local committees in the different towns to work for the cause of Italian unity and liberty.

DUCHESS

[*Sarcastically.*]

Liberty naturally. Every imaginable folly and all crimes have been committed in the name of liberty. What happened in the house of the chemist?

SANTUCCI

We were hardly assembled, when the doors were broken in by the police. Several men who knew the house escaped, but I and three others, including Scalea, were taken . . .

DUCHESS

Scalea? I remember his conspiracy — it was planned to murder the King of Naples and the Pope. That explains your transfer to a Roman prison.

SANTUCCI

I swear to you, Signora, I never had seen or heard of this man. I was not a conspirator against any man's life. I knew of no such conspiracy.

DUCHESS

You blundered into suspicious company, Signor Santucci, and some blunders are as fatal as crimes.

SANTUCCI

I never even knew of what I was accused. I was confronted by no accuser, had no trial and I never again saw the light of day. When my poor wife heard of my arrest, she raised what money she could and came to Naples. She had one hope of saving me — one person upon whose intercession with the King she relied. In her convent days, my wife had been friends with the daughter of an illustrious Roman family — the Princess Isabella Gottifreddi.

DUCHESS

Ah! with the Princess Isabella Gottifreddi?

SANTUCCI

Yes, she had married a great Neapolitan gentleman, the Duke of Teramo, and in those days she lived as Duchess of Teramo in Naples, where she was the reigning favourite at court. People said the King — but, no matter — perhaps the report was false, for she was hated and envied as much as she was feared and admired. Taking with her our little girl, my wife went to implore the Duchess, for the sake of their former friendship — in the name of Christian charity, to speak a word in my favour to the King. She humbled herself before that stony-hearted woman in vain, for the Duchess was deaf to her piteous appeal. She sent that broken-hearted woman and her little child away, without so much as a kind word or a look of pity. When this news was brought to me by a friar who sometimes visited me, I saw red: could my hands have reached the Duchess of Teramo, I would have torn her into shreds: I lived thenceforth — if live you could call it — in an agony of anxiety for the fate of my wife and child. My days, my nights were haunted by such horrors as only a helpless prisoner's imagination could evoke. In every depth of misery, and, oh, God! the visions of my loved one surrounded by the iniquity and vice that beset defenceless women — until I hoped and prayed

for her death and that of our little girl. I called on death to set them free. And I called on God to curse the Duchess of Teramo.

DUCHESS

I am the Duchess of Teramo.

SANTUCCI

You? You? The Duchess of Teramo?

DUCHESS

I am the Duchess of Teramo. So Elena Cavaniglia was your wife? I remember her coming to see me in the winter of 1848, and that I could do nothing for her. You exaggerate my influence at court — many people did that. I might have helped your wife — but she told me nothing of herself or her condition. She talked only of you — begged only for you — she asked nothing for herself, and I never again saw or heard of her.

SANTUCCI

Only for me — only for me! Ah, yes, Duchess, I recognise my devoted little wife, who asked nothing for herself but thought only of me. (*He sobs.*)

DUCHESS

Signor Santucci, believe me, I am not quite the heartless woman you have thought me. You called on God to curse me — to humble me. Well, your prayer has been answered.

SANTUCCI

Forgive me, Duchess; forgive my wild words. In the long years of solitude and silence, I have suffered such anguish as no words can tell. I raved and beat my head against the stones: at times my reason trembled in the balance. Even now, I don't know whether I am sane. The curses of such as I could never reach you. I should not have spoken as I did. Forgive the ravings of a desperate man — forgive and forget!

DUCHESS

If I have anything to forgive you, it is forgiven — but I shall not forget. Perhaps God in His Mercy has given me the opportunity to redeem the wrong I unwittingly did your wife. I will protect you. I will move every power I can command to find your wife, if she still lives, and your child. Twenty years is a long time. . . .

SANTUCCI

Twenty years? Twenty years? . . . What year is this?

DUCHESS

Eighteen sixty-seven.

SANTUCCI

[*Counting vaguely on his fingers.*]

Twenty years. That was in 1848, and I was forty-three years old. . . . A lifetime has gone by

— a lifetime passed in a tomb. Oh, my God! how have I lived for twenty years?

DUCHESS

Italy has passed through great upheavals during those years and many changes have taken place since 1848; but with patience and diligence it ought to be possible to trace your wife and child. If they are to be found, I will find them. I will restore them to you.

SANTUCCI

[*Sobbing.*]

These are the first words of hope, of comfort I have heard from human lips, and they come from you! They are sweet words. Oh, Duchess, how I have misjudged you!

DUCHESS

Who of us does not misjudge? I have seen many notable things but I have not yet seen justice. My chaplain's room just beyond that door is empty; here are the keys to it. There is no other access to that room save through this one, so you will be safe. Dress yourself in some of the chaplain's clothes, and I will let it be known to-morrow that you are a cleric whom he has sent to arrange the archives. Come with me now and I will show you the room, for we have said enough for to-night.

SÀNTUCCI

God bless your noble heart. (*He kisses her dress.*) I only pray to live to see my loved ones once more, and I shall die free, blessing your name. May God reward you!

DUCHESS

My reward is now. Come.

[*She takes the candle and precedes* SANTUCCI *to the small door right.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

(*To play 45 minutes*)

Scene I

A showily-furnished salon in Second Empire style. The stage is divided across the middle by archways partially draped with gorgeous brocatelle hangings, beyond which stands an oblong gaming table for baccarat or rouge et noir ; *the front half of the room is furnished with a number of gilt chairs and two small tables, one to the left, the other to the right side. A gaudy glass chandelier and appliques containing candles furnish the light. The room is in semi-darkness, only a few candles in the front being lighted. At one table sits* Madame Dubosc, *a large, coarse-featured woman; her face is sallow, blotched and unhealthy-looking, her hair frowsy; she wears a shabby, but showy, loose dressing-gown and is in her stockinged feet; she speaks with a strong French accent and is telling her own fortune at cards.* La Marinella *sits opposite, heedless of what the other is doing; she is a woman of a little past thirty, beautiful and exquisitely dressed in a négligé costume of light col-*

our, with many laces; her hair is dressed, but she wears no jewels.

DUBOSC

[*Telling the cards.*]

The knave of spades again! Oh, these cards, these cards!

MARINELLA

What am I to do about my boy? My Marco? What am I to do about him? How I wish he had not written to you that note!

DUBOSC

If you had listened to me last autumn in Gaeta, and quietly left without those gushing farewells, none of this would have happened. Whenever you neglect my advice, *cherie*, you get yourself into a mess. Why did you give him my address if you did not want to see him?

MARINELLA

He made me give it to him. I should never have got away from him without giving it.

DUBOSC

You need not have given him the right one. (*Virtuously.*) Not that I minded him coming here. I have nothing to conceal; I have not deceived him. Better let me see him and tell him the truth.

MARINELLA

Dubosc, I forbid you! He is the only man in the world who respects me, who believes in me. Come what may, he must never know the truth.

DUBOSC

The cards are bad to-night. I should like to know how you intend to prevent him. He can't stop long in Rome, nor come here often without finding out who you are. This is one of the drawbacks to being too well known. (*She deals again.*)

MARINELLA

But he is not going to stop in Rome: in his note to you he says he is only here over-night. He told me he has one more year in the naval academy, and after that two years at sea; by that time I shall be gone from Rome, and he will never see me here — nor anywhere. (*Sadly.*) Perhaps he will have forgotten me.

DUBOSC

So much the better. But if you don't want him to meet Sestri and his crowd, you must get him quickly away. It is now ten o'clock and people will shortly begin to arrive, besides which you must still dress. Again the knave of spades! — a second dark man — and money: they fight. (*She shuffles.*)

MARINELLA

I know, I know! It will only be for a moment —

for a brief moment that I may look again into his honest eyes and feel the charm of his fresh, untainted manhood.

DUBOSC

[*Dealing.*]

Marinella, is it possible you are in love with this boy?

MARINELLA

[*Passionately.*]

Before God, I wish it were! He is such a man as I might have loved, were I not what I am. Love! I have never known love. I know only the loathsome travesty of it: the masquerade of lust in which my womanhood has been degraded. This lad has shown me what love might have been in my life.

DUBOSC

Come, Marinella! You are not yet old enough to be sentimental. After all, this young man is twenty, and he is a naval cadet, so I can't think him quite the little saint you picture him. He seemed to me to be rather knowing in Gaeta.

MARINELLA

[*Fiercely.*]

Stop! I will not have you discuss him. . . .

DUBOSC

Ca c'est trop fort! Moi, je suis française. . . . I . . .

MARINELLA

[*Interrupting.*]

Neither you nor any one. He stands alone in my life — as a symbol. There, there! Dubosc, no doubt you are right — quite right, and I am a fool, but — but we all have foolish moments sometimes. You know, it is just like something in a novel or a play one cries over. . . .

DUBOSC

Oh! this is fatal! and the cards never lie.

[*Enter* GELASIO, *L.*]

GELASIO

Signor Marco asks to see Madame Dubosc.

MARINELLA

You see him first. I'll come back in a moment. (*Exit hastily, R.*)

DUBOSC

Show the gentleman up, and, Gelasio, in exactly fifteen minutes you will return and begin to light the candles — not later, mind, and don't wait for Signora Marinella to ring for you, but come.

GELASIO

Yes, Madame. (*Exit L.*)

DUBOSC

That won't give much time for foolishness. La

Marinella seems a trifle wrought up to-night, and there must be no nonsense with this young naval cadet; he is doubtless penniless. (*She gathers up the cards.*)

[*Enter* GELASIO, *followed by* MARCO.]

[*Exit* GELASIO.]

MARCO

Good evening, Madame Dubosc. You got my note?

DUBOSC

[*Frigidly.*]

Monsieur, I was much surprised to receive it. I did not expect to see you in Rome, and I do not receive visitors in the evennig.

MARCO

[*Abashed.*]

No? Oh! I did not know . . . and, well, Elena gave me your address, and as I was in Rome just over night, I thought I might call and pay you my respects.

DUBOSC

Very thoughtful of you, I am sure. Elena will be able to see you for a very few minutes, but I must ask you to cut your visit short as we have an engagement this evening.

MARCO

Yes, of course; in fact, I have but a short time at

my disposal, as I, too, have an engagement. I am going to Princess Crescenzi's ball. (*Hopefully.*) Perhaps that is where you are going.

DUBOSC

Eh? No! oh, no. We are not going to Princess Crescenzi's ball — not this evening. We are expecting some people here — just a small family party, something quite exceptional for me. I will call Elena. (*She rises and goes: sotto voce.*) Princess Crescenzi's ball! (*Then, bridling.*) *Et pourquoi pas? Je suis française.* (*Exit R.*)

[*Enter* MARINELLA.]

MARCO

Elena!

MARINELLA

Marco! Why, how strange you look!

MARCO

Strange? How strange?

MARINELLA

I never before saw you with your clothes on.

MARCO

So you didn't. But you hardly expected to see me here in a bath-towel?

MARINELLA

No. . . . No . . . I suppose not. But I did like you very much in the bath-towel.

MARCO

Ah! that was when we were outside the world, in our little cove by the wine-coloured sea of Gaeta, with only the blue sky above us. I wish we were back there, Elena, in our fairyland.

MARINELLA

Yes, so do I. But there is never any going back to happiness. If we have it once, we leave it behind and always look for it ahead, but we never again find it — never again.

MARCO

You and I shall find it, Elena, for we shall find it together. Since you left Gaeta last autumn, I dreamed of you by day, and by night I lay awake thinking of you — wondering where you were, wondering if you had forgotten.

MARINELLA

Forget! Ah, no, those days, fragrant with the scent of the jasmine and resonant with the sound of the sea, are all my youth — the only youth I ever had. In the evenings when you were not with me, I fell to star-gazing, and I used to send you my thoughts by a celestial messenger. Did my star give them to you? Perhaps not, for the stars, though they are so many, are given more messages to carry than they can possibly deliver.

MARCO

Then you do love me, Elena? You never would tell me so in Gaeta, and I have so longed to hear you say it.

MARINELLA

Do I? This much I can tell you: you alone are in my thoughts, just as you are alone in my life, for you mean something to me that no one ever did or ever can mean. I have never loved any one — not since my mother died, years ago.

MARCO

You cannot imagine the suspense, the anguish of doubt in which I have lived: fifty times I have been on the point of coming to Rome to find you, for I was tormented by the fear of losing you. I saw you surrounded by men who courted you, who told you they loved you — but nobody can ever love you as I do, Elena.

MARINELLA

I believe that, Marco; nobody's love for me can ever be like yours.

MARCO

But does that sadden you? Why! you are crying, Elena. Why do you weep? Since you believe in my love for you, you will not refuse it — you will not be false to a love you know to be true. We have had our dream you and I, and now we shall have the

reality. All our dreams shall come true. Our idyll by the sea was perfect, and the memories of it will live with us forever, sweetening all our future. But now we must have done with mystery and come out into the light. That is why I have come to Rome and sought you out — to tell you who I am and all about myself. . . .

MARINELLA

No! No! Don't do that, Marco! Don't do that! I don't want to know anything. I want to keep you just as you are — my dream-lover. I want nothing changed; everything must stay just as it is. Don't spoil our idyll, Marco; don't tell me anything, for I can tell you nothing — and you must not ask me.

MARCO

But, Elena dearest, I have come to Rome to ask you to be my wife.

MARINELLA

Your wife? . . . your wife? It is impossible . . . impossible. . . it can never be.

MARCO

Why impossible? What is the obstacle? Elena! you are not . . . not married, are you?

MARINELLA

No, I am not married.

MARCO

Perhaps, then, because you think I am poor? Well, dearest, it is true; I am poor, but . . .

MARINELLA

No, no! It is not that, for I have known poverty, and though it is a fearful thing to be very poor — poor as I mean it — yet I do not fear poverty. It is because I know myself, and because I know you better than you know yourself. Why, Marco, you are but a mere lad, while I — well, we won't talk about my age, but for you I am already too old, and within a very few years I shall be really old, so that you will marvel at your own blindness. I am not the woman to be your wife — for I want you to be happy.

MARCO

I can't be put off with an answer that tells me nothing — that is no answer. . . .

MARINELLA

You must not ask me more. You must not question me. You do not know me, Marco.

MARCO

I don't need to know you. It is enough that I love you — for the rest, I trust you.

MARINELLA

If you trust me, you must believe me, and I tell

you it is impossible . . . impossible. Oh! don't you see how unhappy you are making me — that you are tormenting me?

MARCO

Tormenting you? But it is you who are racking my very heart. Listen to me, Elena: we have gone too far to stop now, for I have told my mother about you and that you were to be my wife. She wants to see you: she wants to see Madame Dubosc. I am sure she will consent, for when she sees you, she will love you.

MARINELLA

You told your mother about me? What did you tell her?

MARCO

Everything. All about our first meeting and the week that followed — that blessed week in Gaeta!

MARINELLA

And what did she say?

MARCO

Well, my mother, Elena — you see, my mother, of course, thought it all sounded a little strange — rather unconventional. She was astonished, and perhaps a trifle shocked. Most people hearing about it would be, wouldn't they? For one can't make them understand, just telling about it, especially

women. But everything will come right, for my mother wants me to be happy, and when she saw how dead in earnest I was, she promised not to oppose me.

MARINELLA

She promised that, without even knowing who I am?

MARCO

No, not precisely, for she wants, of course, to know who you are — that is only natural. She said that it was only necessary for her to see you and Madame Dubosc to make up her mind. She said she had never met Madame Dubosc in society, but she could easily inquire. She knows all the French people in Rome.

MARINELLA

[*Feverishly.*]

There is nothing to inquire about; she need not inquire, for we are leaving Rome immediately — we are going back to Paris. We don't know many people in Rome — no French people at all, and Madame Dubosc never goes in society; she dislikes society; she only came here for her health.

MARCO

Her health? She does not look like an invalid.

MARINELLA

No, of course not, but she is; that is, she was —

she has heart trouble— you see; she is much better now — quite restored, in fact, so we are returning to Paris. Oh, Marco, can't I make you understand? It is all over between us. One thing I promise you. I swear to you I shall never, never forget you, and I shall cherish the remembrance of your love forever as my most sacred possession. Don't ask more: let us keep our happy memories — just that one week, Marco dear; don't rob me of that! Don't spoil it!

MARCO

Elena, you are treating me as though I were a child, but I'll not submit to it. Memories! Memories! Can you live on memories? I can't. I will know what is the barrier between us — this mystery that makes it impossible for you to be my wife, when I know you love me.

MARINELLA

No, no! You are mistaken. I don't love you, Marco — I love what you mean to me; for to me you are the symbol of a love I might have had, but missed, and it is now too late. You are the ghost of what might have been, in the youth of which I was defrauded — the ghost of the happiness I might have had in a life that was denied me. What I say is incomprehensible to you; is it not? You don't understand me, and thank God you can't! For your

youth protects you from the knowledge necessary to understanding.

[*Enter* DUBOSC. *She is in full evening dress; very showy, and wearing flashy jewels. Her face is brilliantly painted and her hair elaborately dressed.*]

DUBOSC

Elena dear, it is very late, and you must go at once and dress. I told Monsieur his visit must be brief.

[*Enter* GELASIO *and other Servants, who begin to light the candles.*]

MARINELLA

[*Self-controlled.*]

Good-bye, Marco. It was good of you to come. As you return to Gaeta to-morrow, we shall not meet again. (*To* DUBOSC.) I have just told Marco that we are leaving soon for Paris.

DUBOSC

Of course we are; at once, in fact. Now go and dress.

MARCO

Madame Dubosc, I beg you to listen to me. I came here to-night to ask your niece to be my wife. . . .

MARINELLA

Hush, Marco! please, please say no more! At

least not now. (*Indicating the servants.*) You may write to Madame Dubosc later, but not now — nothing more now.

DUBOSC

Monsieur, there is no time now to treat such a serious subject. Elena, go at once to your room.

MARINELLA

Good-bye, Marco; good-bye.

[*Exit* MARINELLA.]

MARCO

Elena! Elena! Oh, how can she be so cruel! Madame Dubosc, both you and your niece are treating me as though I were a child or a fool. I am neither. When the men of my family offer marriage to a lady they are accustomed to a courteous hearing — they are entitled to one, and to a sensible answer. My mother, the Duchess of Teramo . . .

DUBOSC

The Duchess of Teramo! Are you crazy?

MARCO

Why, pray, should you think me crazy? Why are you astonished that I should be the son of the Duchess of Teramo? Did you think me a street arab?

DUBOSC

Did you tell Mari . . . I mean, Elena, this?

MARCO

Elena refused to listen to me: she would not let me tell her anything. I don't understand her.

DUBOSC

One thing you may clearly understand — you have had your answer, and she has refused your offer of marriage.

MARCO

One thing I more clearly understand, and that is that she loves me and has never loved anybody else. She has told me so, and I believe her. Then why does she refuse me? For what reason?

DUBOSC

If she has not explained her reasons, then I have nothing more to say. But you take it from me, they are final. *Bon soir*, monsieur.

MARCO

Oh! Madame Dubosc, this treatment of me is unworthy of you — of her; it is cruel to me. . . .

DUBOSC

Say nothing more now — there is no time for further talk; our guests are arriving. Please go — please go at once. Gelasio, this gentleman is going.

MARCO

But I may write, and you will answer me? Elena said I might write.

DUBOSC

Yes, yes! Certainly, write whatever you want to say, but nothing more now — not now. *Bon soir.*

[*Exit* MARCO, *preceded by* GELASIO. SESTRI *enters, crossing* MARCO, *at whom he stares with interest.*]

DUBOSC

[*Sotto voce.*]

The Duchess of Teramo! *Quelle aventure!*

SESTRI

Well, Boschi, my dear, who is the infant in gilt braid and buttons?

DUBOSC

I never answer impertinent questions, Sestri.

SESTRI

Rather callow, is he not? Money? (*She shakes her head.*) Don't tell me you are looking for an *amant de cœur* amongst college boys! If you are, you had better arrange your rendezvous elsewhere, or we shall have the police down on us for corrupting minors.

DUBOSC

When I want advice, Sestri, I'll seek it from some one who manages his own affairs better than you do yours.

SESTRI

Don't be snappy. Where is La Marinella?

DUBOSC

Dressing. What is the news in the haunts of the great?

SESTRI

Nothing particular, except that our friend Guido di Teramo has received a pointed hint that his resignation would be accepted by the governors of the Jockey Club. Old Prince Cividale cut him dead on the Corso before a dozen people, and they say the Princess Frangipani has scratched his name off her list.

DUBOSC

Oh, *la belle affaire!* The Romans are never so comical as when they pose for virtuous. What is the matter now?

SESTRI

That drive on the Pincio with the spaniels was too much. They could stand him with La Marinella alone — but the spaniels, they were the last straw.

DUBOSC

Quelle blague! They know he is ruined, bankrupt, *coulé*. As long as he had money he could do as he liked, and nobody minded.

SESTRI

Now he makes himself a nuisance; tries to borrow of everybody. *Per Bacco*, a regular beggar!

DUBOSC

He has trapped La Marinella, and actually tried it on with me — *une française!* Think of that! A Roman Duke. But in every Roman there lurks the *lazzarone.*

[*Enter* Rossi *and others.*]

Is that not Rossi?

SESTRI

Another impecunious gossip. What does he want here?

DUBOSC

He is charming. He knows all the news.

SESTRI

He has the manners of a monkey and the conversation of a parrot.

ROSSI

But you are *chic* this evening, madame; *très chic.*

SESTRI

She sports our house colours — *rouge et noir.* (*He laughs and withdraws.*)

DUBOSC

[*Glancing angrily after him.*]

Animal! You give us the pleasure so seldom,

monsieur. Tell me, did I not see your admiration, the Duchess of Teramo, to-day at San Marcello?

ROSSI

Doubtless. She never misses the midday Mass.

DUBOSC

No more do I. She had with her a lady — *très distinguée.* Her sister, perhaps?

ROSSI

No. Her guest, from Milan.

DUBOSC

They are great friends?

ROSSI

For the moment they are accomplices — the feminine equivalent. The Milanese countess has a daughter to marry, and the Duchess has a son.

DUBOSC

The Duke Guido will marry?

ROSSI

Oh, no, not the Duke. There is a second son, Marco.

DUBOSC

[*Impulsively.*]

Then he told the truth!

ROSSI

Who?

DUBOSC

[*Recovering herself.*]
Nobody. Nobody *you* know.

ROSSI

You are severe on my friends. (*He withdraws, mingling with the others.*)

[*A number of Men and Women enter: all are fashionably and showily dressed, exhibiting every caprice of the period: the men wear uniforms of the noble-guard, of the French Army of Occupation, or are in evening dress, some with orders. The rooms fill up. People salute* DUBOSC *and* SESTRI, *and some go up to the gambling table, where play begins. The cries of "Banco," "Giucco fatto," "Partita finita" are heard in the hum of the conversation.* DUBOSC *assumes her most haughty air as she moves about:* SESTRI *is familiar with the women, but most of the men are distant with him. Two groups form, one at each of the small tables to the right and left; champagne is served to them. One is composed of* CLAIRETTE, MADDALENA, *a young gentleman and a French Officer.*]

CLAIRETTE

[*To* YOUNG MAN.]
And what brings you here to-night, Baron? I

thought your Russian princess kept you in a tight leash. What is her name?

YOUNG MAN

Who is that pretty girl in blue? (*Indicating a very pretty and well-dressed girl.*)

MADDALENA

That is Pepita. Don't you know her? She was playing the mandolin with her father until a month ago, and now look at her! She has a Russian, Prince Saratoff, who has set her up like a duchess.

CLAIRETTE

Saratoff! That is the name. Why, he is the husband of your charmer, Baron. You ought to know Pepita. (*Calling.*) Pepita! Come here.

[PEPITA *advances nonchalantly.*]

CLAIRETTE

Here is a gentleman who wants to know you — he admires you.

PEPITA

[*Languidly.*]

Oh! as for that . . .

MADDALENA

He is a friend of Princess Saratoff, so you need not be so particular.

PEPITA

The Princess can afford to do as she likes, for she is a married woman: a lady in my position has to be careful.

YOUNG MAN

I hope you are as careful of your virtue as you are of your reputation?

PEPITA

One is careful of whatever is worth keeping. (*She turns away.*)

CLAIRETTE

Pepita is young. But she is a good sort and sticks by her father and her old friends, the musicians.

YOUNG MAN

Her father must be proud of her.

[*Enter* MARINELLA. *She is exquisitely dressed, wears three strings of very large pearls, and carries a fan: her manner during the scene is nervous. People speak to her, everybody looks after her, and she seats herself in front, alone.*]

SESTRI

[*Approaching.*]

Good evening, Marinella. Why, what is the matter? You look as though you had been crying.

MARINELLA

Hold your tongue.

SESTRI

There is something going on here that I don't understand.

DUBOSC

Go and take the bank: that is all you need to understand.

SESTRI

It is too early for me. I say, Marinella, do you know Teramo is finished — has gone bust? All Rome is giving him the cold shoulder, and I think you had better drop him.

MARINELLA

I can't drop what I have never taken up. Guido comes here to play with you, not to see me.

SESTRI

Well, he can't play with me unless he has money. Did you hear what the Duchess said when they told her of his drive with you and the spaniels?

MARINELLA

I did not.

SESTRI

She said the dogs deserved better company. (*He laughs.*)

MARINELLA

[*Snaps her fan, and* SESTRI *stops short.*]

She dared to say that! It is another item in my

long account with Casa Teramo: the Duchess shall pay dearly for this insult when we have our reckoning.

DUBOSC

[*Aside to* SESTRI.]

Take my advice and let Marinella alone to-night: she has her nerves — it is not safe to plague her.

SESTRI

I am damned if I let her alone. I am a partner in this game, and not a silent one. I want to know what is going on. (*To* MARINELLA.) Old Pavoncelli told me you had taken up another of Guido's bills for fourteen thousand francs. It is all dead loss, for they are not worth the paper they are written on.

MARINELLA

I did: and I'll buy every bill, every mortgage, every I.O.U. that bears Guido Teramo's name. I am now his only creditor. I own everything that was once his — the Palazzo Teramo in Rome, the Villa at Viterbo, the Castel Ferrato estate at Porto d'Anzio — all are mine. (*Touching her pearls.*) These are the historic pearls given by the King of Naples to the Duchess on an occasion of which I intend the world shall soon hear more.

SESTRI

What is the object of all this, Marinella? Mar-

riage? Are you going to force him to marry you to save his estates?

MARINELLA

Force him? He would marry me to-morrow if I chose. No! Why should I marry a man devoid of mind as he is of both morals and manners?

DUBOSC

[*Pompously.*]

You would be Duchess of Teramo.

SESTRI

An empty title, since society would neither recognise nor receive you.

MARINELLA

[*Contemptuously.*]

What is society? One half of society should be in gaol and the other half in the asylum.

DUBOSC

There is not a woman in Roman society who has not her lover.

SESTRI

Let us be accurate, Dubosc. A lover before marriage costs a woman her character; her choice of one after marriage makes her reputation.

[MARINELLA *turns disdainfully away and sits alone.*]

SESTRI

[*To* DUBOSC.]

Accidente! Is she playing us? She can't be in love with Guido?

DUBOSC

Can't you see she hates him.

SESTRI

That is just as good a reason for marrying him. I won't have it.

DUBOSC

Jealous? Do you aspire to be her lover?

SESTRI

She makes me a fool.

DUBOSC

It is the same thing.

ROSSI

[*Approaches* MARINELLA *and speaks over her shoulder.*] Do I disturb your dreams?

MARINELLA

Nobody can do that.

ROSSI

I have a word of warning for your private ear. This scandal with the Duke of Teramo is attracting attention in high quarters. His uncle, Cardinal

Gottifreddi, has been summoned by the Pope, and Cardinal Antonelli is pressing the French ambassador to withdraw his protection from you: it is hinted the Pope may write to Napoleon.

MARINELLA

And the ambassador?

ROSSI

Is fencing, to gain time.

MARINELLA

Whom does he most fear? Paris or Rome?

ROSSI

It is his business to satisfy both.

MARINELLA

He will not find that easy.

ROSSI

Unless you will make it so for him.

MARINELLA

How?

ROSSI

Conjure the brewing storm by a timely and discreet self-effacement — temporary, *bien-entendu* — a month in Naples for your health — or Gaeta.

MARINELLA

I shall never again see Gaeta.

ROSSI

I thought I had heard you were delighted with it.

MARINELLA

Then I should not make the mistake of revisiting a place where I had been happy. I shall take my own time. I have Paris behind me and I do not fear Rome.

ROSSI

If you will accept me as your counsellor — you will put the ambassador under obligation to you.

MARINELLA

That would be to make him my enemy.

ROSSI

You know I am your friend, Marinella?

MARINELLA

You are nobody's friend, Rossi. Adroit as you are, I wonder how you keep your place.

ROSSI

By always reporting what my superiors want to hear,— that is the secret of my success in the service.

MARINELLA

The service! By the bye, Rossi, in whose service precisely are you?

ROSSI

I am at present, officially, in the service of France, but my devotion to the interests of Holy Church constrains me — in my private capacity — to place my abilities at the disposition of the Pope. I lend my services intermittently to Mazzini, out of pure admiration for his audacity, and I sell them in Florence when I am hard up. My good friend Palmerston had no cause to complain of my fidelity in the old days, for he was the best paymaster. Ah, those excellent English! There is no rogue like a Puritan.

MARINELLA

And your convictions — where are they?

ROSSI

Convictions are not the outcome of reason but of temperament. Mine keep close company with my interests.

MARINELLA

And they?

ROSSI

Are migratory, according to the movement of events.

MARINELLA

You are even more despicable than I thought you.

ROSSI

We are all despicable to those who know us; but I have claims to your admiration.

MARINELLA

Indeed? And why?

ROSSI

For the courage I show in revealing myself to a woman.

MARINELLA

Your revelations leave me sceptical. I never doubted you more than at this moment.

ROSSI

I deserve your rebuke, for I have over-played my part. What sensible woman ever believes a man of brains is telling her the truth when talking about himself?

MARINELLA

The answer to that is obvious. It is as a confirmed liar you achieve your best success.

ROSSI

On the contrary, it is my incredible truthfulness that has won for me a reputation for mendacity.

[*Enter* GUIDO. *He is animated and greets people gaily as he gradually approaches* MARINELLA.]

SESTRI

[*Approaching* MARINELLA.]
Here is Teramo; he looks elated.

MARINELLA

Unless he brings money he shall not play here. If he does, Sestri, see to it that he leaves it here — you understand? Every penny of it.

SESTRI

That is as good as done.

[*He takes the bank at baccarat.*]

ROSSI

[*To* DUBOSC, *indicating a long-haired, æsthetic youth, talking to a girl.*]

Who is your minor poet?

DUBOSC

[*Proudly.*]

Theophile Vernet. *C'est un français.*

ROSSI

Ah! Vernet: the man who has written a book of modern fables in verse.

DUBOSC

[*Sentimental.*]

Just like Lafontaine. I read Lafontaine in the convent; *c'était si joli.* He made all the animals act like people.

ROSSI

Just so. But Vernet makes all his people act like animals.

[*Enter* GELASIO.]

GELASIO

Madame, the musicians are here.

DUBOSC

[*To* MARINELLA.]

Shall we have some music? The Neapolitans are here.

MARINELLA

Yes, music. Let them come in, and we'll have a dance. Rossi, give me your arm.

[*Exit* GELASIO.]

[*The room is cleared for a dance,* DUBOSC *officiously directing.*]

[*Enter half-a-dozen musicians, with mandolins, guitars, violin, etc. They wear gay Ciocciaro costumes. The girl* PEPITA *salutes them with effusion and gives them champagne. During the dance her father watches her with smiles of proud approval. A dance is arranged, either Lancers or Quadrilles, by eight guests, or a tarantella danced by the men and two girls of the musicians. As the dance is about to finish, a row breaks out at the card-table. Women scream;* GUIDO *calls* SESTRI *a cheat;* SESTRI *gives him the lie and strikes him. Men interfere.*]

MARINELLA

Dubosc! Stop that noise! Stop those men! What is the matter?

[DUBOSC *goes hastily towards the card-table, calling excitedly, but* GUIDO *and* SESTRI *come to the front, amidst loud voices and confusion.*]

SESTRI

[*Calling to Noble-guard.*]

Carlino, will you act for me? I want a second. (*To* GUIDO.) Choose your seconds, if you can find anybody above a lacquey to act for you. Choose your weapons. I will fight you when and where and how you please.

GUIDO

I don't fight with card-sharpers. Give me the money you stole from me, you cheat!

SESTRI

Oh, you won't fight me? Then I'll horsewhip you in the Corso if you dare to show your face in the public street; I'll publish you all over Italy as a coward!

ROSSI

[*Calmly.*]

Gentlemen! Gentlemen! You both forget yourselves. Remember, gentlemen, we are all men of honour. My lord Duke, the Marquis dei Sestri is rightly offended by your hasty accusations and has named a second to represent him. You cannot re-

fuse him satisfaction. If you decline to apologise, you must choose some one to act for you.

GUIDO

[*Recovering his dignity.*]

You are right, Rossi; I am obliged to you. My accusation was not hasty, and an apology is out of the question. (*He approaches a gentleman, speaks sotto voce and then turns to* SESTRI.) Baron Caravita will meet your friend.

SESTRI

[*Sneeringly.*]

Tanto meglio!

[*The men separate; exclamations and movement.*]

[GELASIO *enters excitedly and approaches* DUBOSC.]

GELASIO

Madame, the police are at the lower door — a deputy — commissary and four men. He demands admittance.

DUBOSC

Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! (*Excitedly.*) Clear the rooms. *Vite! Vite!* Away with the tables, and get out — get out! every one of you! Gelasio, put out the lights. *Quel scandale — et dans une maison française!*

[*Guests rush pell-mell towards back and dis-*

appear. Other servants appear, whisk away the card-table like magic, and put out most of the lights, save two or three in front. DUBOSC *assists in snuffing out candles, etc.* MARINELLA, GUIDO, ROSSI, *and* DUBOSC *remain.*]

ROSSI

My warning was none too soon. These men have come at an unfortunate moment. There will be trouble.

MARINELLA

Go down to the commissary and ask him what he means by battering at my door at this hour.

DUBOSC

Quelle infamie — et dans une maison française! I read this in the cards.

MARINELLA

Tell him there is no gambling here and no disturbance, save what he and his men are making. If he chooses to verify, he may come up and see for himself — but without his men.

DUBOSC

Morbleu! c'est une maison française.

MARINELLA

Remind him that I am under the protection of the

French government, and he forces my door at his peril.

ROSSI

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

If that still goes.

MARINELLA

You must make it go — at least for to-night.

DUBOSC

Give him your purse — that is more important still; especially if the deputy-commissary is old Martinoli.

[MARINELLA *gives* ROSSI *her purse.*]

ROSSI

I'll do my best. (*To* GUIDO.) You will find Caravita in his rooms in an hour.

[GUIDO *nods assent, and makes as though to follow him, but* MARINELLA *stops him.*]

MARINELLA

I have still something to say to you Teramo. I won't keep you but a moment.

[*Exit* ROSSI.]

[*To* DUBOSC, *who is still arranging furniture, etc.*]

Dubosc, bring me the blue leather envelope and the small account-book from the safe.

[*Gesture of disapproval from* DUBOSC. *Exit* DUBOSC.]

GUIDO

If you get into trouble over this, don't blame me.

MARINELLA

You are a veritable *jettatore* (*making the sign of the horns with first and little fingers*). You bring disaster wherever you appear.

GUIDO

I? But this is Sestri's doing. He is always up to some new cardsharper's tricks.

MARINELLA

Sestri has no new tricks. All gamblers' tricks were old when Noah's ark was new. Nobody imagines, I fancy, that gambling tables are run for the proprietor's pleasure. The game here is played to win.

GUIDO

That is all right, but you need not have a professional swindler to run your table.

MARINELLA

I have heard the same term applied to you. I am not interested in Sestri's methods, but in the results and I hold you both in equal esteem.

[*Enter* DUBOSC, *with the book and envelope.*]

DUBOSC

Here they are.

MARINELLA

Thanks. Give them to me; and, Dubosc, you need not wait. I wish to talk to Don Guido alone.

DUBOSC

[*Disapprovingly.*]

Comme vous voulez — mais — (*Exit slowly up centre.*)

MARINELLA

These papers should be of interest to you. You have many debts?

GUIDO

So I am told.

MARINELLA

Which you do not pay?

GUIDO

Certo! If I paid them I should not have them?

MARINELLA

And your creditors . . . do you know them?

GUIDO

I can't say that I do. I have had money from the usual bloodsuckers — Pavoncelli, Stein, Rosenburg I don't exactly know; they seem to be decent enough fellows — not so bad as they are pictured — and for

the last year they have not even bothered me for interest or renewals.

MARINELLA

Have you wondered why?

GUIDO

No . . . I suppose they knew it was useless.

MARINELLA

It is because all your debts are in the possession of one person; you have but one creditor — myself.

GUIDO

You?

MARINELLA

I have bought up all your bills — all your I. O. U.'s. I hold the mortgages you have given on your properties. I redeemed the pawn-tickets on which you had raised loans — everything you owe, as far as I know, you owe to me.

GUIDO

[*Trying to look sentimental.*]

Marinella! You dear girl! How shall I express my gratitude? Your generosity puts me in a most delicate position . . . I would . . . I ought . . .

MARINELLA

You are floundering, Guido. I have not acquired your debts with the purpose of accepting your name

and title, and, incidentally, yourself. I have done it as a speculation.

GUIDO

I am not quite sure I see where you will make your profit.

MARINELLA

Then I will tell you. I have a straightforward offer to make to you — a bargain I wish to propose and conclude here and now. I will destroy, before your eyes, every one of the papers in this envelope, and set you absolutely free from debt, on one condition.

GUIDO

Name it. I consent beforehand.

MARINELLA

It is so trifling it may sound foolish to you. There lies in an inner drawer of a large cabinet, standing in your mother's private salon, a small packet of letters, wrapped in a piece of faded blue silk and securely tied with a blue and gold cord. I want those letters.

GUIDO

How do you know what is in my mother's cabinet?

MARINELLA

Never mind how — it is enough that I do know.

GUIDO

I never saw such a packet. I know the cabinet, of course, and my mother keeps all her papers in it. What are these letters, and of what value are they to you?

MARINELLA

The letters are there, and they are important to me. More than that I will not tell you. Get them, bring them to me — in the packet, intact as it is — and in return I will release you from debt.

GUIDO

They must indeed be valuable, if they are worth my entire estate.

MARINELLA

To me they are worth that. Nobody else would give you a scudo for them.

GUIDO

Are they legal papers — documents —?

MARINELLA

No, they are letters of a private correspondence between persons who interest me; they are of value only to me — and to your mother.

GUIDO

My obligations to my mother are not many.

MARINELLA

Your obligations to me are great.

GUIDO

You shall have the letters.

MARINELLA

Now, to-night.

GUIDO

To-night?

MARINELLA

It must be to-night. To-night as well as another time you can get them. Bring them here, and I will give you in exchange what I have promised. I will wait for you here. Go and get the packet.

GUIDO

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

It is not precisely a nice undertaking — to break open my mother's cabinet. . . . Some people might even call it stealing.

MARINELLA

Possibly. But how can a man like you get anything unless he steals it.

GUIDO

After all, I am the head of the family, and whatever is my mother's is mine.

MARINELLA

You have your choice. Refuse, and I shall fore-

close. Once the seals are put on your house, the letters are bound to be mine in any case. Choose.

GUIDO

Wait for me here. Within an hour you shall have the letters.

MARINELLA

Within an hour you will have no debts.

[*Exit* GUIDO.]

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

Salon of the DUCHESS. *The room is dark, with faint light from the large brazier of charcoals.*

GUIDO *enters, carrying a candle shaded by a glass screen; he approaches the cabinet and begins to open the drawers; one resists, and he uses a knife he carries to force it open, muttering to himself: noise of cracking wood and the springing of the lock.*

SANTUCCI *enters from the small door right; he is dressed in the chaplain's cassock.*

SANTUCCI

[*Running forward.*]

Who is there? Ah! Thieves! Thieves!

[*He clutches at* GUIDO, *who turns upon him.*]

GUIDO

[*In suppressed voice.*]

Who the devil are you? Let me go.

SANTUCCI

[*Grappling feebly with him and calling in a weak voice.*]

Help! Help! Thieves! Robbers! Help! (*Recognising* GUIDO.) Ah! It is the same man — the same man. . . .

[GUIDO *wrenches himself loose, seizes a heavy paper-knife and strikes* SANTUCCI *repeatedly on the head.* SANTUCCI *falls, groaning, to the floor and lies silent.* GUIDO *hastily seizes the packet he has found and leaving his candle, rushes from the room by the centre door.*]

[*Enter* DUCHESS. *Her hair is loose and she is wrapped in a large dressing gown, and carries a candle.*]

DUCHESS

[*Peering about.*]

Who is there? I heard a noise and voices. Who is there?

[SANTUCCI *struggling feebly to his feet; his face and head covered with blood: he stammers a few incoherent words.*]

DUCHESS

Ah! So you are a thief. . . . You would rob me?

SANTUCCI

[*Moaning.*]

No, no! not a thief, no! I tried to stop him, but he struck me.

DUCHESS

Who? Who struck you? Where is he?

SANTUCCI

He is gone. It was the same man who stole the money; he has broken open the cabinet.

DUCHESS

[*Hastily searching in the drawers.*]

Guido! My private drawer open! My letters — the King's letters are gone. (*She pulls out letters and papers, scattering them on the floor.*) How did he know? What can he want with my letters?

[SANTUCCI *falls senseless to the floor.*]

DUCHESS

[*Bending over.*]

The man is dead!

[*She rings the bell, and in a moment* TERESA, *in her nightdress and a shawl appears.*]

TERESA

Excellency! Madonna santissima! What is the matter? Are you ill? (*She does not see* SANTUCCI.)

DUCHESS

[*Recovering herself.*]

No — that is, yes — I want to see . . . has Countess Cavalese returned from the ball?

TERESA

I heard the carriage drive into the courtyard a moment ago.

DUCHESS

Go and ask the Countess to come here at once. Be quick.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

[*The* DUCHESS *bends over* SANTUCCI *and then falls to searching again amongst the papers.*]

He must have taken them by mistake. He was looking for more money — looking for jewels — but the letters! Oh! If he reads them! He is capable of anything.

[*Enter* TERESA *and* COUNTESS, COUNTESS *is in full ball dress, blazing with diamonds.*]

COUNTESS

My dear Isabella! What is the matter? What is wrong? Are you ill?

DUCHESS

No, but I need you. Teresa, wait outside the door.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

COUNTESS

What in God's name has happened? (*She sees the open cabinet and scattered papers.*) A robbery?

DUCHESS

Maria, I have been robbed — oh! not of money nor of jewels, for I possess none — but of something worth far more to me than all I ever possessed: of some letters that are dearer to me than life.

COUNTESS

What letters? Who robbed you?

DUCHESS

My son.

COUNTESS

Marco? No, he just now came in with us.

DUCHESS

Guido. Listen, Maria. My son has twice robbed me this night. First, he came here shortly after you left me: he bullied and threatened me — he behaved like a madman wrenched open that drawer and stole the bag of money from the charity bazaar. He stole it, in spite of all I could say or do to stop him.

COUNTESS

Incredible! I can't believe it.

DUCHESS

Since you are not a thief I suppose you can't.

COUNTESS

My poor, dear Isabella! Never mind: I'll make it all good — nobody need ever know. But the letters?

DUCHESS

Strange things have happened in this room to-night — strange even in Casa Teramo, where we are accustomed to lawlessness — and even crimes. When we spoke of the flight of a prisoner from Sant' Angelo to-night, you declared you hoped he would escape: you said you would do anything in the world to help him. Were you sincere?

COUNTESS

Indeed I was. I would do anything to help him.

DUCHESS

Well, he is here.

[*She takes the candle and shows her* SANTUCCI's *body.*]

COUNTESS

Misericordia! Oh! blood! the man is dead!

DUCHESS

If he is dead, Guido is a murderer as well as a thief.

COUNTESS

But that man is a priest.

DUCHESS

No; he wears a cassock of Serafini's, but he is no priest. Help me to lift him up.

COUNTESS

[*Horrified.*]

Oh! I would not touch him for worlds! I don't like dead men.

DUCHESS

He is not dead — or was not ten minutes ago. We must try to revive him: help me to raise him.

COUNTESS

I can't, I can't. The sight of blood turns me faint. I can't touch him. It is too horrible. Oh, *Dio mio!*

DUCHESS

[*Goes to the door.*]

Teresa, go at once and call Don Marco: tell him I want him here instantly.

COUNTESS

How did this man come here? Who is he?

DUCHESS

I will tell you his story later. He gained access to this room by a secret staircase, of which the door is behind that portrait. Those stairs lead to the vaults under the palace. All Rome — at least on

this Trastevere side — was formerly honeycombed with underground passages, most of which have been filled up; but one evidently still exists, into which the escaped prisoner found his way, and thus crept to the door behind the picture.

COUNTESS

And you can live in a house like this — where criminals fall into your rooms from behind the pictures: I shall never sleep another night under this roof. Let me get Angela safely back to Milan, that is all I ask. I have seen enough of Rome.

DUCHESS

Don't be hysterical, Maria. A few hours ago the escaping prisoner was a hero — a martyr in your eyes. Now you call him a criminal. You said you would do anything in the world to help him, but you can't look at him without turning faint, and nothing would induce you to touch him with your finger. You are not very logical, my dear, and not at all helpful. Here is Marco.

[*Enter* MARCO.]

MARCO

What is happening? Why do you want me at this hour, mother?

DUCHESS

Marco, there is a wounded man in this room — he

may be dead, for what I know — in any case, we must carry him to the chaplain's room. (*She shows* SANTUCCI *to* MARCO.)

MARCO

A priest! What is the matter with him?

DUCHESS

He is not a priest: but never mind: help me to raise him up.

MARCO

I put my flask in my pocket: here, let me give him some brandy.

DUCHESS

Maria, do bring my salts from the dressing-table.

[*Exit* COUNTESS *into* DUCHESS' *bedroom, then returning.*]

[*They revive* SANTUCCI *with the salts and brandy; they get him on his legs, and, leaning heavily on* MARCO *and the* DUCHESS, *he is led to the small door,* COUNTESS *bearing the candle; the three then return.*]

[DUCHESS *goes to the door and speaks to* TERESA.]

DUCHESS

Teresa, go at once and waken Dr. Negroni: tell him to come immediately. (*She closes the door.*)

Negroni's rooms are in the lower courtyard, and he should be here within ten minutes. Now sit down, and I will tell you the story of Sisto Santucci.

[*They all sit.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

(*To play 45 minutes*)

Scene I

The next morning at ten o'clock.

The salon of the Duchess.

Duchess of Teramo, Countess Cavalese, *the former in négligé morning costume,* Teresa *and* Negroni.

Negroni *enters by the small door at right back as the curtain rises.*

Countess *is dressed in black, with mantilla, for a papal audience; she wears pearls and some diamond ornaments in her veil.*

DUCHESS

Well, Negroni, how is he?

NEGRONI

Very bad, Your Excellency.

COUNTESS

Misericordia! You don't think he will die?

NEGRONI

There is little chance of his recovery. The wound

on his head is, in itself, serious, and the loss of blood in his debilitated condition is extremely so.

DUCHESS

Is he conscious?

NEGRONI

Perfectly. His mind is quite clear.

DUCHESS

What do you advise, Negroni?

NEGRONI

Your Excellency's wish to keep the man's presence here a secret is hopeless. I do not say he cannot recover, but he is suffering also from nervous apprehension: every sound startles him, and he has a hunted, anxious look in his eyes, as though he feared pursuers or . . .

DUCHESS

Never mind what he fears; he is suffering from hallucinations.

NEGRONI

No doubt, since Your Excellency says so. His concealment here contributes to them. I suggest that he be taken to a hospital.

DUCHESS

I think you are right. The Mother Superior of Santa Monica would permit him to be cared for inside

the clausura. Please go at once to Santa Monica's and explain my wishes to the Mother Superior, and the urgency of the case. Make the best arrangements you can for his speedy removal.

NEGRONI

Your Excellency's commands shall be scrupulously obeyed. I shall return within an hour.

[*Exit* NEGRONI, *left front.*]

DUCHESS

Teresa, go and sit in the room with the sick man. You have the doctor's instructions, and if anything more is wanted, call me — but no one else.

TERESA

Yes, Your Excellency.

[*Exit* TERESA *by small door, right back.*]

COUNTESS

What a night we have passed!

DUCHESS

With, perhaps, the worst yet to come.

COUNTESS

What worse can come, Isabella?

DUCHESS

Suppose Santucci were discovered — or suppose he were to die here? Think of my position. Dead

or alive, his presence in my house must not be known. And Guido? Anything may be expected from him. Oh, Maria! you may thank God you have a daughter instead of sons.

COUNTESS

It would not be human to be satisfied with what I have: even though Angela is the most delightful of daughters.

DUCHESS

How is the dear child this morning?

COUNTESS

I left her dressing.

DUCHESS

Your audience at the Vatican is at noon, and His Holiness exacts punctuality. My brother, the Cardinal, will be waiting for you in the secret antecamera at exactly five minutes before twelve.

[*Enter footman, announcing* BARONESS FERRARI.]

DUCHESS

Pazienza! Pazienza! Now I must listen to Ottavia.

[*Enter* OTTAVIA; *her air is mournful but important.*]

OTTAVIA

Oh! my dear Duchess. Countess.

[*Salutations exchanged.*]

DUCHESS

Good morning, Ottavia. You are early; I never before saw you here at this hour.

OTTAVIA

When a work of holy charity calls, all hours are the same to me. I have been to the first communion mass of the daughters of Mary at Santa Francesca Romana, and I must hurry on to the Requiem of the Archdeacon Pelagello at San Damaso, but I had to come in to speak a word of comfort to you in your affliction.

DUCHESS

[*Glancing nervously at* COUNTESS.]

Affliction? What are you talking about?

OTTAVIA

All Rome is talking about it. Have you not heard of the awful scandal in the house of that reprobate creature, La Marinella? Oh! Mother of Mercy! I don't know what we are coming to.

DUCHESS

Well, what are we coming to? I have heard nothing of any scandal — not of any new one.

COUNTESS

Did you get your information from the children of Mary?

OTTAVIA

From the Mother Superior All the nuns are praying for you, Duchess.

COUNTESS

How is it that nuns inside their convents are always the first to know everything that happens outside?

[*Footman announces* DONNA FRANCESCA VIVATELLI.]

DUCHESS

Francesca also! There must indeed be a scandal, to bring her here at ten o'clock the morning after a ball.

[*Enter* FRANCESCA.]

FRANCESCA

[*Fluttering nervously.*]

Oh, my dear Duchess! What a calamity! What a tragedy!

OTTAVIA

Francesca, don't fidget. I was just telling the Duchess . . .

DUCHESS

Ottavia is so slow, it takes her so long to get anything out. What has happened, Francesca? I know nothing.

FRANCESCA

Guido and the Marquis dei Sestri quarrelled last night at La Marinella's. Everybody says they are to fight a duel to-day — perhaps they have fought it already, and somebody is certainly dead — probably both of them. Oh, *Gesu Maria!* And to think you never knew it!

[*Footman announces* Don Filippo di Rossi.]

DUCHESS

Information seems to be finally reaching me.

COUNTESS

This begins to resemble a congress.

[*Enter* Rossi. *He kisses the hands of both ladies.*]

ROSSI

[*Importantly.*]

Ah, dear Duchess! It pains me unspeakably to bring you disturbing news.

DUCHESS

I have just heard from these ladies that Guido and Sestri have quarrelled and are to fight a duel. What was it about?

FRANCESCA

A frightful scene of jealousy about La Marinella.

ROSSI

Not at all. La Marinella had nothing to do with it. The trouble began over the baccarat table. Sestri took the bank and Guido was winning steadily. He had a pile of about eight thousand scudi on the table when the row broke out. Just what happened nobody seems to know, but Sestri raked in the lot. Guido accused him of cheating and Sestri struck at Guido. Then the police broke into the house. . . .

OTTAVIA

I hope they arrested the brazen Jezebel — the woman of sin, of whom the prophet Jeremiah declared . . .

FRANCESCA

The prophet Jeremiah never heard of La Marinella.

OTTAVIA

There were Marinellas even in Jeremiah's time. There are always Marinellas.

DUCHESS

Go on, Rossi. What happened next?

ROSSI

The police were bought off. The place was cleared and a duel was arranged for this morning. The police are going to interfere and stop it. Cardinal

Antonelli has sent for the French ambassador and it is thought La Marinella will be expelled from Rome this very day — whether the embassy likes it or not.

OTTAVIA

Let Rome be purified.

COUNTESS

It will require more than the departure of La Marinella to purify Rome. Isabella dear, do go and rest. You can do nothing now, and you need quiet.

DUCHESS

[*Rising.*]

You are right, Maria; at my age too many emotions are exhausting.

OTTAVIA

Call on me if you need assistance or comfort. I shall come in again after the Requiem.

FRANCESCA

If I hear any more news I'll come and tell you, though I am sure everybody will be in bed for hours after that heavenly ball. (*Sotto voce.*) The flounces were too lovely! I had a *succés fou.*

DUCHESS

[*Smiling at her and speaking to* Rossi.]

You must explain Vatican etiquette to the Countess; she and Donna Angela have an audience at

noon, and I have had no time to coach them. You will find the Countess a shocking liberal.

[*Exit* DUCHESS.]

COUNTESS

People in Rome seem to consider us Milanese barbarians and heretics. (*To* OTTAVIA.) Have you ever been to Milan, Baroness?

OTTAVIA

Miserere! No! What should I go to Milan for? It is miles away.

COUNTESS

Not too far for us to come here.

OTTAVIA

That is quite different — all roads lead to Rome, you know.

COUNTESS

I am sure they do; nothing else could account for the human *pot-pourri* one finds here. But Romans themselves should travel. They are very provincial, and most of them seem to view the world through the window of a sacristy. It would do the Pope so much good if he would go about more.

OTTAVIA

The Pope go about! Where should he go?

COUNTESS

Let him go to Paris.

ROSSI

Or to Jericho.

OTTAVIA

The experience of the last Pope who went to Paris would hardly encourage his successors to repeat the journey.

FRANCESCA

And what did you think of the ball, Countess? Donna Angela was too sweet! And did you notice how devoted Don Marco was?

COUNTESS

Of course the setting was superb. I grant you there are no palaces like the Roman. I thought these three rococo salons hung with water-colours quite unique.

ROSSI

The older masters are good, but the moderns are not represented. Princess Crescenzi is a dear creature, but she has no taste for art — none whatever.

FRANCESCA

Wasn't it only last night you declared she was artistic?

ROSSI

Certainly not. All women are artful, some are artificial, but none are artistic.

COUNTESS

Well, the ball was a great success, and Angela was delighted. I did not see you there, Baroness.

OTTAVIA

Since the demise of my beloved consort, I have renounced the vanities of the world. Balls may be tolerated for the very young, and the frivolous (*looking scornfully at* FRANCESCA) who would otherwise go to worse places; but in the meditations of Santa Teresa it is . . .

FRANCESCA

Santa Teresa is not an authority on balls.

OTTAVIA

Francesca, don't fidget!

ROSSI

You were a vision last night, Francesca.

COUNTESS

And what exquisite laces you wore! — Point d'Alençon. A family heirloom, I suppose?

FRANCESCA

Precisely, yes.

[OTTAVIA *retires to the extreme back and reads a large prayer-book like a missal.*]

COUNTESS

[*To* Rossi.]

Donna Ottavia seems to pass her life in pious exercises.

ROSSI

Tartuffe in petticoats; she typifies the triumph of piety over religion.

COUNTESS

How monotonous.

ROSSI

Oh, no! She finds variety by constantly meddling with people whose only wish is to be let alone.

FRANCESCA

Do tell us more about what happened last night.

COUNTESS

And since when has the famous Marinella abandoned the stage to live in Rome?

ROSSI

For the last few years she has kept a hospitable house where men arrive rich and leave poor.

COUNTESS

I saw her dance in Paris several years ago — she is the greatest since Taglioni. I suppose she has many lovers?

ROSSI

Report assigns her many. I almost believe her to be virtuous.

COUNTESS

And Don Guido?

ROSSI

He was never her lover; he is her debtor.

COUNTESS

That is a form of attachment. He seems a *mauvais sujet* like his savage father.

GUIDO

He is worse and with a difference. The father was a wild boar, if you like, but the son is a swine.

COUNTESS

Were you at La Marinella's when the quarrel occurred?

ROSSI

By the merest chance, yes.

COUNTESS

Then you do go there?

ROSSI

I don't go, but I have been — just out of pure curiosity.

COUNTESS

Curiosity is never pure.

ROSSI

It is all that is left me, Countess. I am fifty — and fat. Nothing remains but to observe the follies of others.

COUNTESS

You find that easy in Rome, I fancy.

ROSSI

Everything is easier in Rome than elsewhere. The Romans are too indolent to control their passions and too indifferent to conceal their vices. Rome is the home of toleration.

COUNTESS

I think of it as the home of fanaticism.

ROSSI

How can there be fanaticism where there are no convictions?

COUNTESS

You forget religion.

ROSSI

So would you if you had lived here as long as I have. Religion is the chief Roman article of export, and the foreign demand leaves none of the commodity for home consumption.

FRANCESCA

Don Filippo rarely knows what he is talking about.

and never means a word he says. He only loves Naples since he left it. And he really adores Rome, but it is his weakness never to be witty without being ill-natured.

COUNTESS

I can't think of Don Filippo as a Neapolitan.

FRANCESCA

And why?

COUNTESS

Because I never knew a Neapolitan who was not a duke.

[*Enter* VALENTINI. *He looks agitated, but important and solemn.*]

ROSSI

Well, Valentini, what is the news?

VALENTINI

The Duchess is not here? Has she gone out?

FRANCESCA

Gone to her room, quite upset about Guido.

ROSSI

What is the news, Valentini? Of the duel, I mean.

VALENTINI

Don Guido is dead.

[*All exclaim, and* OTTAVIA *comes forward, lamenting.*]

ROSSI

We shall all miss him — missed by many and mourned by none. *Voilà* the epitaph of Guido.

OTTAVIA

Cut off in his sins — without the sacraments! excommunicated — excommunicated!

ROSSI

[*Sarcastically.*]

Ottavia do be serious for once. Remember that death is always fundamentally a tragedy that may sometimes bring relief but should never provoke mirth.

OTTAVIA

[*Scandalised.*]

Mirth! Where is the unhappy creature's soul? That is what I want to know.

VALENTINI

His body is at the Morgue.

ROSSI

A final exhibition of his taste for vulgar surroundings. Valentini, you must see to his immediate removal; now that Guido can be controlled, he must be restored to good society. A duke is out of place at the Morgue.

COUNTESS

Well, it is all sudden.

FRANCESCA

Death is apt to be sudden.

ROSSI

And Guido was always impulsive — he did everything by fits and starts.

FRANCESCA

Valentini, it is your duty to tell the Duchess.

VALENTINI

[*Horrified.*]

I? Never! I'll face the Morgue, but not the Duchess.

[*Exit hastily.*]

ROSSI

You go, Ottavia, and whatever you do, don't break the news gently.

OTTAVIA

I go to pray for his soul — though I fear it is too late — too late! Requiescat in pace!

[*Exit* OTTAVIA, *tragically.*]

ROSSI

[*Calling after her.*]

Ottavia, don't fidget.

FRANCESCA

It is too distressing. I am overcome.

[*She pretends to faint, but nobody notices her, so she gradually revives.*]

COUNTESS

But somebody must tell her. You go, Don Filippo.

ROSSI

Oh, no. The providential removal of Guido is a luminous response to fervent but unspoken prayers.

COUNTESS

Doubtless, and what then?

ROSSI

The Duchess might betray her satisfaction, and I always avoid witnessing what I am not intended to see.

COUNTESS

Tactful man; but are none of you willing to tell her the truth?

ROSSI

We are all willing, but we are out of practice.

[*Enter* ANGELA. *She is dressed in a costume of black chantilly lace, with mantilla, for a Papal audience.*]

ANGELA

Mamma, the carriage is announced.

COUNTESS

Oh, my dear, there is shocking news. We must cut our visit short, and return to-night to Milan. The Duke of Teramo is dead — killed in a duel. Be calm, my child; don't agitate yourself; be calm!

ANGELA

[*With perfect calm.*]
Yes, Mamma.

ROSSI

You realise, Countess, what this means? Marco is now Duke of Teramo.

FRANCESCA

Isn't it astonishing?

ROSSI

No: it is a habit of the Duchess to have things her own way. Hence was she long since styled victorious. She always wins.

FRANCESCA

Donna Angela will make a charming Duchess of Teramo.

COUNTESS

You go too fast, Donna Francesca; much too fast. Nothing is settled, and I don't at all know what Angela thinks.

FRANCESCA

[*To* ANGELA.]

You have captivated all hearts in Rome, Donna Angela — you have only to choose. Don Marco is at your feet.

COUNTESS

Pay no attention to what Donna Francesca says, my dear. She romances.

ANGELA

[*Timidly.*]

Well, Mamma, you always said you liked sailors.

COUNTESS

I think you must be mistaken, my child. I know very little about them, except that they seem to lead rather damp lives and are too flighty to make good husbands. After Bartlett's disquieting revelations about the wife in every port, I could never allow you to marry a sailor.

ROSSI

The Duke of Teramo will hardly remain in the navy.

[*Enter* TERESA.]

TERESA

The carriage is waiting for Your Excellency.

COUNTESS

Come, Angela. Teresa, there is bad news: the Duke of Teramo is dead.

TERESA

[*Crossing herself.*]

God rest his soul! What a relief for my mistress! It is not often the right people die.

COUNTESS

But the Duchess does not know it: you must tell her, Teresa.

TERESA

Madonna santissima! I carry death tidings? Never!

COUNTESS

Apparently the Duchess will be the last person in Rome to hear of her son's death.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN, *carrying a letter on a salver.*]

FOOTMAN

For her Excellency: a lady is waiting.

[TERESA *takes the letter and goes to the* DUCHESS' *room.*]

ROSSI

Permit me to see you to your carriage, Countess. What would your late father-in-law, General Cavalese, say to your going to kiss the Pope's foot?

COUNTESS

Oh, the General was quite willing to kiss the Pope's

feet, but he thought it wise to tie his hands. Come, Angela. What a household!

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter* TERESA.]

TERESA

[*To* FOOTMAN.]

Show the lady in here.

[*Enter* DUCHESS, *carrying an open letter.*]

DUCHESS

[*Sotto voce.*]

One of my stolen letters. This is strange . . . strange. (*She seats herself by the table, front.*) You may go, Teresa; and see that I am not interrupted. If Dr. Negroni returns from the hospital, come and tell me; but otherwise I am not to be disturbed.

TERESA

Yes, Your Excellency.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

[FOOTMAN *opens the door.*]

[*Enter* LA MARINELLA. FOOTMAN *closes the door behind her. She wears a dark cloak completely covering her dress, and a thick veil; these she at once removes and stands, superbly dressed, wearing ermine furs and the three strings of pearls, before the* DUCHESS: *her air is defiant, and triumphant. The*

DUCHESS *looks at her intently, but with haughty curiosity, neither rising nor asking her to be seated.*]

DUCHESS

[*Very deliberately.*]
You are the bearer of this letter?

[MARINELLA *assents with an inclination barely perceptible.*]
and you have others — in your possession?

MARINELLA

Yes, *the* others — all of them.

DUCHESS

And you have come here to give them to me?

MARINELLA

No.

DUCHESS

To sell them to me?

MARINELLA

I do not sell, Duchess; I buy.

DUCHESS

This is the second time within twenty-four hours that you dare to present yourself in my house.

MARINELLA

[*Seating herself.*]
It is not I who am in this house on sufferance.

Let there be no mistake in our relative positions. If you are, in appearance, at home in this house, it is solely because I do not choose to say the word that would turn you out of it.

DUCHESS

Your intention is evidently to be insolent.

MARINELLA

My intention is to accomplish a work of tardy justice. Four years ago I established myself in Rome for one sole purpose — to force you to expiate your crimes against God and against humanity.

DUCHESS

You are melodramatic. I fail to recognise myself in the character you assign me. The only thing I am interested in hearing from you is the terms on which I am to recover my private letters, which were stolen from me last night, and which have found their way, somehow, into your possession.

MARINELLA

I bought them from your son Guido.

DUCHESS

I did not ask to know.

MARINELLA

Ah! but you shall know — that and more. Entrenched behind your high rank and the homage of

your world — you have heard only what it suited you to hear. One by one the barriers that hedged you off from the consequences of your selfishness and hypocrisy have fallen. It was left for me to break down the last one.

DUCHESS

If you have forced your way into my presence to relieve your feelings in a torrent of violent language, this conversation had better end now. Women of your class . . .

MARINELLA

Of my class? I am from necessity what you are from choice. That is the only difference between us. The evidence of these letters — your royal lover's hand and yours — puts us in precisely the same class. You have kept the world's respect, while I have lost it. Public opinion is a capricious tribunal that condemns without proof and punishes without mercy; it also protects without justice and rewards without merit. But I return scorn for scorn. I despise your world which despises me, and I appeal to the justice of God to judge between us — between the Duchess of Teramo and La Marinella.

DUCHESS

I trust, Signora, that I am, in spite of my many faults, too good a Christian to despise any one. I

know you only by reputation, and while public opinion is based on appearances, appearances are not always misleading. I am aware of no reason why your enmity towards the world, whose judgments you affect to despise, should be visited upon me.

MARINELLA

Because it is you who have made me what I am.

DUCHESS

Do you mean that my son has wronged you?

MARINELLA

Oh, no! Your son's weakness is not woman — he is a libertine, devoid both of sentiment and passion; he has only appetites. The conquest of a gambler is easy enough and I have helped him generously on his road to ruin. During the past four years I have carefully bought every debt — every I.O.U., every mortgage Don Guido ever made, until I held him at my mercy. (*Touching her pearls.*) I even own these.

DUCHESS

My pearls! This is insufferable!

MARINELLA

Last night, in exchange for the packet of letters he brought me, I cancelled all his indebtedness, and he is free — his properties are again his own, so precious to me are those letters.

DUCHESS

Am I also to hear the explanation of this mystery?

MARINELLA

Do you remember the year 1847?

DUCHESS

As well as any other.

MARINELLA

Do you remember that on a certain evening in December of that year, there came to you a woman, leading by the hand her child, to plead with you to save her husband's life, to speak a word on his behalf to the King of Naples and obtain his release from the dungeon of Sant' Elmo, where he was being tortured, for no crime but merely on suspicion? Do you remember that woman?

DUCHESS

Elena Cavaniglia, from Capua.

MARINELLA

Who had been your school friend, when you were girls together in the convent.

DUCHESS

We called her La Santarella, because she was so good; and one girl, an ecstatic creature, declared she sometimes saw a halo around her head.

MARINELLA

That girl saw true; the halo was there, and you did well to call her La Santarella, for she was one of God's saints.

DUCHESS

And you? — what was Elena Cavaniglia to you?

MARINELLA

[*Bowing her head in her hands.*]
My mother.

DUCHESS

And she . . . ? Is she living?

MARINELLA

You murdered her that December night twenty years ago when you repulsed her and drove her out into the streets of Naples. That was the only home we knew until my dear mother died of starvation in a cellar at Portici. You don't know much about the life an abandoned orphan girl leads in the slums of Naples, I fancy. During four years I lived honestly, for I felt the presence of my sainted mother always hovering around me. Finally, one hot day in June, when I had gone fasting from dawn, I sank exhausted by the side of the road. I was dazed, and almost faint. Suddenly there was a movement amongst the people, and the way was cleared: a brilliant carriage drawn by prancing horses rolled through the parting crowd. I caught a glimpse of

the profile of a woman in a cloud of lace, shaded by a rose-coloured parasol. The dirt from the wheels struck me in the face where I crouched in the gutter — and I heard people saying to one another: "The Duchess of Teramo! The Duchess of Teramo!" in hushed tones of admiration, almost as though the Sacred Host had passed by. Then I surrendered. Verga, master of the ballet at the San Carlo, took me in and for three years trained me. Finally the opportunity came: late in the afternoon of a gala performance for the King's birthday, the *prima assoluta*, the famous Contarini, was taken ill: the impresario was in despair, when, at the last moment, Verga produced me. The triumph of that evening was but the first of all that followed during the eight years I danced. The dancing of La Marinella became the sensation of the capitals of Europe, and a torrent of gold was poured at my feet. From penury and obscurity I leaped into fame and luxury — but at the cost of all that I prized — my honour. For me, sin was sacrifice; pleasure I never knew, for the sense of my degradation was never absent. My mother's spirit haunted me — I could never free myself from her presence.

DUCHESS

[*Softly.*]

Signora, your story moves me more than you may think.

MARINELLA

I have not come here to solicit your pity. If I have shown you something of my life, it was that you might realise your guilt, not to arouse your compassion for my shame. My mother knelt to you — and she knelt in vain. Her death and the sacrifice of my honour were the consequences. The sacrifice of yours is the expiation I exact.

DUCHESS

Your mother would not . . .

MARINELLA

You are not worthy to speak my mother's name. I intend the world shall see you and know you as I do, as it knows me. I intend to publish the correspondence between you and the King. I might have married your son Guido and worn your title, but that would have made you a martyr in the eyes of your world. It is your humiliation I exact. Now you know why I paid the price I did for your letters.

DUCHESS

[*Calmly.*]

How did you know of the existence of those letters?

MARINELLA

Three years ago I had in my pay a person who occupied a confidential position in your household: it

was he who saw the letters and who was to have secured them for me.

DUCHESS

I understand. He was caught in the act of rifling my cabinet. I remember.

MARINELLA

It was then that I turned to Don Guido. I found him devoid of scruples and indifferent to honour: it only required time to bring him to it.

DUCHESS

Then you sent him here to rob me?

MARINELLA

I did.

DUCHESS

You have paid a much greater price for those poor, guilty letters, Signora, than you imagine. I will not defend myself against your accusations. You will know the truth very soon. After that, you may do as you like with my letters. Does your father also judge me as you do?

MARINELLA

He is dead. Tortured to death, perhaps, in the prisons of Naples by the friends who seized him, and, despite his innocence, murdered him. They were your friends, Duchess, those monsters of in-

iquity who ground the people's faces and drained their blood in those days. You, more than all others, incarnated their pride, their cruelty, their hypocrisy. It is for that I have planned and striven for your punishment. The hope of humiliating you has been my lodestar; it has been my religion.

DUCHESS

[*Calmly.*]
And if your father were not dead?

MARINELLA

If he were not dead?

DUCHESS

You have no proof of his death. You arraign me for murder without even knowing that your father is dead. What if you have fed your disordered frenzy for vengeance on a fiction of your imagination?

MARINELLA

Were he not dead, I should have found him. I have wealth and I have powerful friends, all of which I have used to trace my father's whereabouts. Prisons have been searched, their records examined — everything has been done over and over again, but without result. If Sisto Santucci still lived, I should have found him six years ago, when I went to Naples with influence behind me that opened every door of

search. But no cell gave up its victim — no grave gave up its dead.

DUCHESS

And yet, I say, you have no proof. I will not argue about the responsibility you would fasten on me for your mother's sufferings and for the ruin of your young life. But I ask you, suppose your father were living — would you want to see him?

MARINELLA

I would give all I possess to know that he lived — to see him. But you are playing with me; you seek to soften me by talking of my father — by holding out possibilities — hopes that he may still live. (*Sneeringly.*) You are doubtless a very astute woman, Duchess, in your own world — but spare yourself such feeble efforts to turn me from my purpose.

DUCHESS

Perhaps you have always been moved by pity for yourself rather than love for your parents; it is yourself you seek to revenge — not them, else you would welcome the hope I offer you.

MARINELLA

It is a false one. I distrust you as much as I hate you. It is idle for us to discuss. I came to tell you my intentions; now I go to fulfil them. (*She moves towards door.*)

DUCHESS

Every step you take away from me carries you farther from your father.

MARINELLA

[*Turning.*]

What do you mean — farther from my father?

DUCHESS

That your father is here.

MARINELLA

[*Overcome.*]

Here? Here? Where?

DUCHESS

But a few yards distant — he is in the next room.

MARINELLA

Ah! Ah! God forgive you if you are tricking me. No! it is not possible. I will kill you with my hands, here in this room, if you are lying to me!

DUCHESS

[*Calmly.*]

I am telling you the truth. Your father is in the next room — under my protection — but in danger of his life. (*She rises.*)

MARINELLA

In danger?

DUCHESS

Signora Marinella, I have heard you denounce me as a murderer, and I have had patience while you made your appeal to God for Justice, and talked of your sacred right to vengeance. Now listen to me, for I will show you the foolishness, the wickedness you have blindly worked. After drawing him on to his ruin, you sent a son to rob his mother of letters that you might deliver family secrets to the world and disgrace her whom you have erected into your enemy. You conclude an infamous bargain with my unnatural son and you bought from him my letters. I told you a few moments since that you had paid a far higher price for them than you imagined.

MARINELLA

What do you mean? What has this to do with my father's presence here? — if he be here.

DUCHESS

The price you paid was your father's life.

MARINELLA

Ah! Ah!

DUCHESS

You sent Don Guido to rob — he also murdered.

MARINELLA

Murdered?

DUCHESS

Your father, Sisto Santucci, escaped two days ago from Castel Sant' Angelo; he found his way through secret underground passages that led him into this palace and into this room where I was. He was exhausted, famished, bitten by hungry rats, half frozen because he was almost naked. I restored him, fed him, hid him in that room, unknown to any one.

MARINELLA

No! No! It can't be. My father is dead . . . dead. You are mistaken.

DUCHESS

I am not mistaken. He sat there by the fire last night and told me his story. An hour later, Don Guido, sent by you, entered this room as a thief and forced the lock of yonder cabinet. Santucci heard the noise and came to see what was happening. He mistook my son for a housebreaker and tried to stop him. They struggled, but your father was weak, and Guido struck him on the head with this knife and felled him senseless to the floor. Thus you obtained my letters. That was the price you paid.

MARINELLA

Oh! *Dio mio! Dio mio!* He is dead! — my father is dead!

DUCHESS

No, he is not dead, but his condition is very grave. The doctor does not exclude hope, though he offers none. I have sent him to arrange to have Santucci carried to the hospital and I have asked the Mother Superior to allow him inside the clausura, where he will be in no danger of being found — for the police are hunting for him.

MARINELLA

You . . . you have done this for my father? And what shall I say to you?

DUCHESS

Say nothing, but learn how dangerous, how foolhardy it is for us poor humans to tamper with the wheels of fate, that move ever on, despite our wills and heedless of our understanding. Vengeance is not ours, but God's, and we are forbidden to judge one another — how, then, shall we claim the right to punish?

MARINELLA

But my father — when shall I see him?

DUCHESS

That must be managed with caution, for a shock — even of joy — might kill him. I faithfully promised him that I would find you and bring you to him. He longs to see you; he lives only on that hope, for

that joy. To die free, with you by his side to receive his blessing and close his eyes.

MARINELLA

And I. . . . Oh, *Dio mio!* How am I to see him? Should he suspect the life I have led, he would drive me from his presence with his curse.

DUCHESS

He need never know. Well, Teresa?

[*Enter* TERESA.]

TERESA

Dr. Negroni has returned, Your Excellency.

DUCHESS

Is there any one with him?

TERESA

Yes, Your Excellency, two bearers from the hospital, who bring a stretcher.

DUCHESS

Show them through to the chaplain's room.

[*Exit* TERESA.]

[*To* MARINELLA.]

Stand behind this screen. You will see your father without him seeing you. Make no sound.

[*They arrange the screen, behind which* MARINELLA *takes her place, nervously twitching her hands and showing signs of intense agita-*

tion; meanwhile NEGRONI *and the bearers, followed by* TERESA, *have crossed the room and passed through the small door, bearing a stretcher. They return in an instant:* SANTUCCI, *looking ghastly pale, with bandaged head, lies inanimate, covered with a white sheet: they put him down where* MARINELLA *can see him.*]

DUCHESS

[*Softly to* NEGRONI.]

Is everything arranged as I desired?

NEGRONI

Everything. The Mother Superior is happy to obey you.

DUCHESS

Please wait with these men in the next room. Negroni, I wish to speak alone with your patient.

NEGRONI

Certainly. No agitation, remember.

[*Exeunt* NEGRONI *and Men, and* TERESA.]

DUCHESS

[*Kneeling by the stretcher.*]

Signor Santucci, you are going now to Santa Monica Hospital, where the Mother Superior has consented to receive you inside the clausura, and where the good nuns will faithfully attend to you. There you will be safe from pursuit.

SANTUCCI

[*Feebly.*]

God bless you, Duchess. I shall need no refuge long.

DUCHESS

Don't say that, my friend. You are weak, but you must get back your strength. Now you are free — after years of imprisonment and suffering, you are free, and you must live (*glancing at* MARINELLA) for your daughter's sake.

SANTUCCI

My daughter! — my darling Mari' Elena! Ah! were she with me, who knows? perhaps she might give me strength. My little girl — my little girl!

DUCHESS

She is no longer a little girl now — she is a grown woman.

SANTUCCI

Yes, a woman — a good woman, like her dear mother, for she had her mother's sweet eyes and pure brow: her mother, Duchess, was a saint. I sometimes almost trembled when I came into her presence — there was something intangibly sacred about her. I was not a religious man, but when I looked at my wife with our child in her arms, I realised the sanctity of motherhood. Perhaps Mari' Elena has children of her own. What joy for me to find her happy — surrounded by her family!

DUCHESS

But . . . suppose, Signor Sanctucci . . . just suppose it were otherwise. Suppose she has been unfortunate, that she has gone under in the struggle? You spoke last night of the dangers and temptations that beset defenceless girls. Suppose you were to find your daughter . . . unhappy?

SANTUCCI

Dishonoured? No! I would rather she were dead.

DUCHESS

Has suffering taught you so little? Misery is the mother of much sin. You said your child was beautiful, but beauty is more often a woman's ruin than her happiness. Ah! my friend, you were innocent, and yet you were caught up in the merciless wheels of fate, and ground to powder. Innocence does not protect — it betrays. We cannot know whether your daughter's innocence was her salvation or her perdition. If she is now unhappy, she will need you all the more — and will you, therefore, love her less?

SANTUCCI

Need me? How can I help any one, when I cannot help myself?

DUCHESS

You can give her your love. If she suffers under

the harsh judgment of the world, she will need the refuge that only you can offer her — a father's love.

SANTUCCI

You are right, Duchess; the world's judgments are cruel. If my child has fallen . . . a victim to misery, she is still my daughter, all the more my daughter. I shall want her love, just the same. May God send her to me!

DUCHESS

I feel that your prayer will be answered — your wish granted.

SANTUCCI

[*Hopefully.*]

Almost, I believe you. I feel somehow as though she were near me. Perhaps it is the fever, but her sweet presence seems near, so near.

DUCHESS

I don't think it is the fever. You know I promised you to search for her — to leave no stone unturned until I found her.

SANTUCCI

You have been an angel of mercy and hope to me.

DUCHESS

I have good news for you. Oh! nothing absolutely certain, so don't agitate yourself, but some indica-

tion, some hopeful sign, a trace which I shall follow. I have spoken with one this morning who knew her, who knows her, and who, I feel confident, will bring Mari' Elena to you.

SANTUCCI

I will live — I must live till then. Mari'— Mari' Elena, my child, come back to your desolate father! . . . come to sweeten his last hour, to close his weary eyes! Ah, Duchess, will she come?

DUCHESS

She will come, my friend, she will. I, too, feel it just as strongly as you do, and I have no fever. But you must get strong — keep quiet and get strong.

[*She goes to the door and summons* NEGRONI, *the Men and* TERESA, *who enter. The Men raise the stretcher and go out, preceded by* TERESA, *who opens and closes the door, while* NEGRONI *walks by the side.*]

SANTUCCI

Farewell, Duchess. Let me kiss your hand. Are you sure you have forgiven me? You won't leave me alone?

DUCHESS

[*Playfully.*]

Don't ask foolish questions, my friend, and remem-

ber all I have told you. I will come to see you, Mari' Elena and I will come together. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt.*]

[MARINELLA *has assisted at this scene, overcome with conflicting emotions: she now takes the pearls from her neck, the packet of letters in a blue silk covering from her pocket, and comes towards the* DUCHESS, *before whom she sinks to her knees in a posture of extreme humility, silently holding up the pearls and the packet. As the* DUCHESS *takes them, she touches* MARINELLA'S *hand with a kindly pat; a faint smile of satisfaction, quickly suppressed, plays on her face.*]

DUCHESS

Did you recognise him?

MARINELLA

[*With covered face, nods assent.*]

Tell me what I must do to be with him.

DUCHESS

Do you wish to go to the hospital?

MARINELLA

I wish to be with my father. I will give all I possess to that hospital, if they will only let me come there as a servant — as anything, so that I may be with him. I loathe my life and I will leave it, if those nuns will take me.

DUCHESS

I am Patroness of Santa Monica's, and I will ask the Mother Superior to admit you to the ward and give you the habit on probation. None of the sisters will know who you are, only the Reverend Mother. You may choose your own time and way to reveal yourself to your father.

MARINELLA

You will do this . . . for me . . . who . . . ? Oh! Duchess, my humiliation, my misery is abject. . . . I don't . . .

DUCHESS

There, there; let us say no more of the mistakes — *our* mistakes — in the past; it is the present that concerns us.

[*Enter* MARCO; *he looks agitated and does not perceive* MARINELLA *at first.*]

MARCO

Madre cara, there is bad news! Guido . . .

MARINELLA

[*Aside.*]
His mother! (*She shrinks back.*)

DUCHESS

Well, what of him?

MARCO

Guido was wounded this morning . . . seriously, perhaps even mortally, in a duel with the Marquis dei Sestri. We must be prepared for the worst.

DUCHESS

You mean that he is . . . dead?

MARCO

[*Embracing her.*]

Yes — he is dead, an hour ago.

DUCHESS

[*A moment's silence.*]

He lived an unworthy life and he has died an evil death. May God have mercy on his soul!

MARCO

[*Seeing* MARINELLA.]

Elena! You here with my mother!

DUCHESS

Elena?

MARCO

Yes, this is Elena. You surely know that?

MARINELLA

[*Advancing.*]

Duchess, he did not know . . . he does not know.

DUCHESS

[*In hard tones.*]

You are the woman — the widow — my son met last autumn at Gaeta?

MARCO

Of course she is. If you don't know her, how does she come here?

DUCHESS

She is the daughter of Sisto Santucci.

MARCO

The escaped prisoner?

MARINELLA

Does he know?

DUCHESS

He helped last night to care for your father, and I told him the story.

MARCO

Then you do know her, and her mother was your school-friend. How glad I am! You said last night that all you wanted was to see her and to know who she was. Remember your promise not to oppose our marriage.

DUCHESS

She is Elena Santucci, but she bears another . . .

MARINELLA

Stop! stop! I forbid you to speak. . . .

DUCHESS

You forbid?

MARINELLA

No, no. I don't mean that. I entreat . . . I implore you, Duchess, be silent!

DUCHESS

And sacrifice my son? Never! This boy is mine — he is all I have, all I have ever had in this world, and I will defend him against you, against himself, at no matter what cost. You shall not ruin another Duke of Teramo.

MARCO

Another?

MARINELLA

For pity's sake — for God's sake, Duchess, don't! don't! Give me a moment's time, and I will explain. I will make him understand. (*She essays a lighter tone.*) Why, he has told you all about our meeting and our mornings in Gaeta. It all happened by chance, and I did not even know who he was. No harm was done, and you must not take his folly too seriously.

MARCO

Folly! You call my love for you folly?

MARINELLA

Yes, Marco dear, the maddest folly. You call it love, but it is merely your first illusion. I owe you the happiest hours of my life — of my very sad life — but I like you too well to make a fool of you, and not well enough to make a fool of myself.

MARCO

You have deceived me . . . ?

MARINELLA

When a man deceives himself, he always blames a woman —

MARCO

You told me you had never loved any one else, and that no one could ever love you as I do.

MARINELLA

Yes, yes! No one's love for me could ever be like yours — that is what I said, Marco, and I meant it. I do mean it.

MARCO

Then you are mine, and nothing shall part us.

DUCHESS

I restored your father to you; now give me back my son. Since he is deaf to reason, he must hear truth.

MARCO

Last night my mother had never heard of you — apparently — nor did you know I was her son; and this morning I find you closeted together. How did you come here? Why did you come here?

MARINELLA

Your mother has saved my father's life. It is she who has brought us together and henceforth I shall live only for him. There is no room in my life, no desire in my heart for any one or anything else; that is my answer, Marco. Now let me go.

MARCO

[*Stepping before her.*]
No, you shall not go.

DUCHESS

Marco, let her go. Signora, cut short this painful scene and leave us.

MARCO

When she leaves, I go with her. She is to be my wife.

MARINELLA

No, no, no!

DUCHESS

For that my consent is necessary. You are still a minor, and there is the law.

MARCO

We can wait.

DUCHESS

[*With sarcasm.*]

Or dispense with the ceremony — in this case. . . .

MARINELLA

[*Approaching her.*]

Don't, don't! I beseech you! Have I not done my best?

DUCHESS

You have not told him the truth.

MARINELLA

You are merciless! Listen to me, Marco. I meant never to see you again after I left Gaeta. Fate brought us together there, a kind fate that gave us one week of simple, innocent happiness such as I had never before known. I bless every one of those hours we spent together — they are the golden hours of my life. But now that my father is restored to me, broken and helpless, nothing else in the world matters to me. Never again will I quit his side, and I shall remain, when he leaves me, with the nuns of Santa Monica's until my turn comes to follow him. I have renounced the world. He is the only reality in my life — you are the dream.

MARCO

You in a cloister! God does not call you to a religious life.

MARINELLA

Though He has not called me, God will welcome me. I am to-day giving all my fortune to that hospital. I have made my vow.

MARCO

This is a pretext. There is something more . . . something behind, which you do not tell me.

MARINELLA

Why can you not believe me when I tell you that we are separated by a gulf that nothing can span?

MARCO

My love can bridge any gulf.

MARINELLA

[*Weeping.*]

Let me go, and forget me — be merciful to us both, to yourself as well as to me. (*To the* DUCHESS.) I cannot tell him,— you have set me a task beyond my strength and he is cruel with the pitiless cruelty of youth.

DUCHESS

Only the truth will set him free. Remember, I hold your father's liberty, his life, as my hostage.

MARINELLA

[*Terrified.*]

You threaten me? You would undo . . . ?

DUCHESS

I defend my son.

MARCO

You both talk in riddles. Elena, my mother is right. You owe me the truth. I must know. I will know.

MARINELLA

[*With forced calm.*]

So be it; you shall have the truth. Your brother, Guido, is dead — killed in a duel, purposely provoked over a gaming-table. You know he was a gambler, I suppose? He died a ruined man. Did you ever hear who ruined him? . . . the woman's name? . . . for of course it was a woman — only women do such things.

MARCO

Yes; the ballet-dancer . . . La Marinella: everybody knows that.

MARINELLA

[*Half-bitterly, half-proudly.*]

Of course they do. Everybody knows La Marinella. She is famous. . . .

MARCO

She is infamous.

MARINELLA

[*Shrinking.*]

Ah!

DUCHESS

Hush, Marco! You don't know what you are saying.

MARCO

I do know. Do you defend this creature who has murdered Guido and well-nigh ruined the house of Teramo?

MARINELLA

Perhaps, if you knew, Marco . . . perhaps there may be something to be said even for La Marinella.

MARCO

There is nothing.

MARINELLA

Nothing? She is a woman. . . .

MARCO

We need not remember what she has forgotten. But why are we talking about this person whom we none of us know, and all despise?

DUCHESS

You are very hard. . . .

MARINELLA

But he is making it easier for me. Listen, Marco.

La Marinella is famous for her dancing, for her beauty, for the hearts she has broken and the men she has driven to poverty, to dishonour and to suicide. She glories in the blight she brings upon all who fall under her evil influence, for she is a woman at enmity with the world, a creature without a heart, without passions even, for she takes all — love, fortune, honour, life, and she gives nothing in return; and in the end she laughs at her victims. Amidst the insolent pageant of luxury in which she moves, La Marinella lives alone — always alone; everywhere she is a stranger, a nameless waif, without home, without friends, without love — bereft of everything, living only with memories that torture her. She is haunted — haunted always by a face, by a voice — her mother's; and they leave her no respite. The law of her life is hate — hatred for the creature called *man*, to whom her virgin honour was sacrificed for the right to live.

MARCO

[*Beginning to comprehend.*]

What do you mean? Mother, who is she?

MARINELLA

[*Approaching and looking fixedly at him.*]

Your life has dawned like a summer's day in beauty — will you blast its promise and have it to set in storm? Is there then some maleficent star, some

fateful planet that drives the destinies of Casa Teramo into the sinister orbit of La Marinella, that you should follow in your dead brother's footsteps? For I am La Marinella. Now you know. You would have the truth — now you know. Duchess, I give you back your son. My debt is paid. La Marinella is quits with Casa Teramo.

[*Exit* MARINELLA.]

[MARCO, *dazed and grief-stricken, sinks upon a chair and covers his face. The* DUCHESS *resists her impulse to comfort him, takes the packet of letters from the table, and drops them one by one on the charcoals in the brazier. Her face wears a smile of quiet satisfaction.*]

CURTAIN

THE END

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